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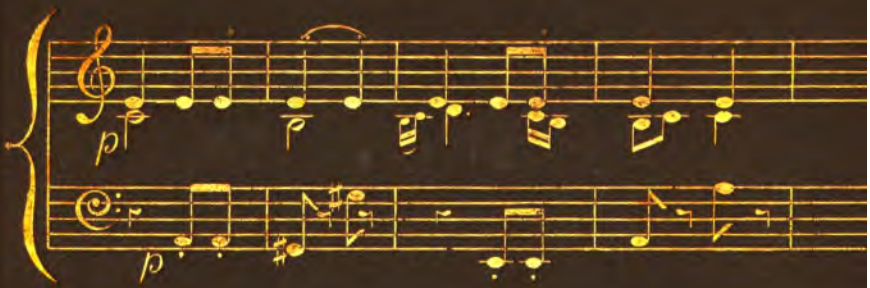
A POEM

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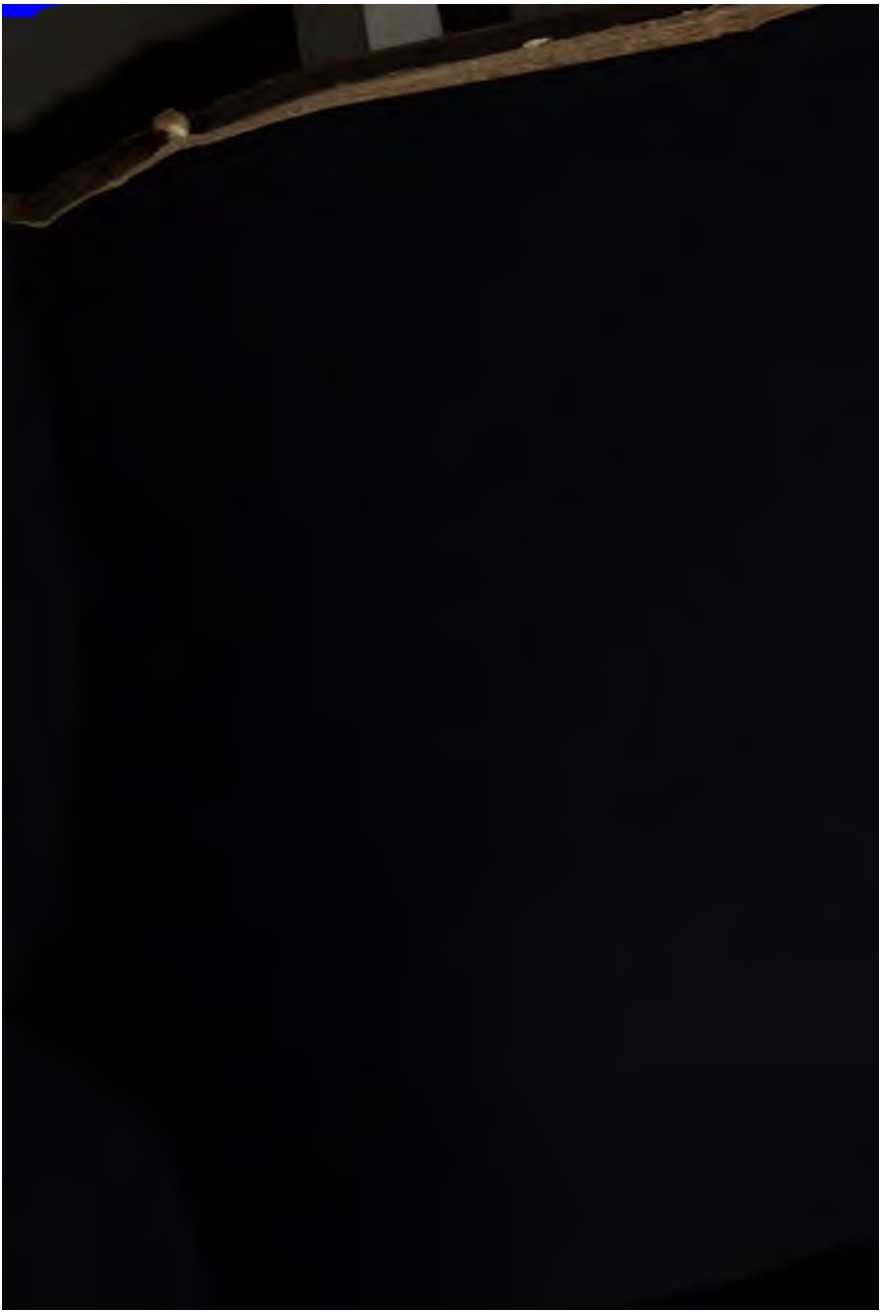

MILICENT

MILICENT

A POEM

BY

E. FAIRFAX BYRRNE

LONDON
C. KEGAN PAUL & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1881

280. o. 664.

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TO

M. E. S. AND G. S.,

MY SISTER AND BROTHER-IN-LAW,

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.

I.

" O strange bird, why wingest thou thus the wild day ?
O white bird, what bringest thou back from the way ?
I lie on the branch of my pine-scented tree,
But I send all my thought up to cloudland and thee.
Shall I fail, O thou sweet bird, or have I the wings ?
Can I soar, as the lark in his gladness upsprings ?
May I reach the far heaven of thy fire-crested haunt ?
Or shall the cold distance my rash spirit daunt ? "

" Ah ! sweet pilgrim soul, thou shalt journey alone,
For thy passionate whisper to God hath out-flown ;
And the white morning gathered thy low plaining voice,
And the night murmured out to the stars of thy choice.
He hath writ in His book ; thou shalt follow anon
Where thy deep enrapt thinking before thee hath gone ;
And the strange hidden way on thy knowledge shall break
When the storm of His secret thy heart shall awake ! "

It is the story of sweet Faith I sing;
Of Faith that looked amid the glooms of doubt
Up to the star that still shall conquer night,
Up to the possible highest of its thought;
Until that beam from the eternal good
Grew to a saving light,—as the first ray
Of morning broadens to a perfect noon.

Again, I sing the story of true Love;
Of dreaming Love, that first mistook its end
And missed the way and stumbled; Love that grew
From fair romances to a fairer thing;
Of learning Love, that found ev'n Love himself,
If Love could have his will, would ofttimes hurt
Where he would bless, would slay where he would pour
His own heart's blood to save. Poor Love! Blind Love!
Our best of insight is what we call Love,
And yet we paint him blind! For blind our sight
When we would scan the secrets of the mind
And all the stranger needs of brother souls,
See through the uncut leaves of other lives
And write the pain of our own blessing there.
Love can alone unwind the murky veil
From his sweet eyes when he uplifts his head
To the far loneliness of the great skies,

And still enough to catch each beaded note
The careless thrush dropped in his fitful glee;
And, yet again, to hear the little leaves
Turn on their restless pivots on the tree.

Close to her window-ledge sat Milicent—
A solitary maiden, with lithe hands
That lay in idleness upon her knee
Or fondly strayed about her late-read book.
She leaned above the bush of eglantine
And made the hour a quiet place wherein
To hang her ardent thoughts like burning gems.
Lovely her head, and touched by pensiveness
That bowed it, flower-like, down; and yet her face,
Her strange fair face, missed that alluring trait
Which, more than beauty does, commandeth love.
Hint of great issues on her fateful brow
Destroyed the grace of lovely-seeming ease;
Within the grey depths of her eyes there lurked
A glance too keen for love's attractive art—
Or now, some mournful spirit made them weird,
Or now, they gazed in unresponsive calm.
She had a mouth where tendernesses play
Round lines of sadness and of forceful will;
Sweet looks—and yet an inward trouble made
The whole too inharmonious for delight.

Sad are the souls to whom their genius lends
Thoughts of a greater enterprise than match
Their nature's puissance, or deftly weaves
A little torturing coil of crimson thread
Across the mind's white weft.

For Milicent,
Her soul perplexed with visions from afar,
Confused with these realities of earth.
She reached her thoughts towards a larger sphere
And gathered motives thence, and fitted them—
Or sadly strove to fit them—to her day.
Much wiser in their generation are
The children of the earth than those of Light!
Little of worldly wisdom had she gained;
The luminous fair thoughts that round her mind
Revolved, shut out the prudences that rule
The common things of day, that guide the feet
In safe and narrow ways, and flat good roads.
Her spirit seemed to find its natural home
In splendours of the stars. But then her dreams,
Brought down to earth, obscured the firmer sense
And cast o'er tinsel's self a glow of gold;
And thus the tributes of her nature flowed
Ofttimes to false or ill-elected kings.
In meanness and in wrong she scarce believed;
She threw her ample sweep of noble thought
For royal covering o'er all she loved,
And saw the creatures nearest to her heart
Moving as godlike miracles along
The high celestial ways.

And for each one
Her love and friendship, in fair loyalty
Begun, grew perfect unto sacrifice;
And all the choicer blossoms of her thought
(And rare her every thought) she offered up
To saints of her affection, or to deck

Her dream-like shrines of love; and she had fain
Yielded more delicate blooms, and blamed herself
That imperfections of the earth should run
Entangling weeds amongst her holy flowers.

But round this gentle moonlight-haunted land,
This garden of her fancy, sown with dreams
That breathed themselves into ethereal blooms
Far from the windy world,—there ran a shore
Where the strewn pearls from deeper thoughts than wont
And fringe of alien treasures tossed from far,
Gave hint that somewhere, heaving in the dark,
An undiscovered sea of passion lay,
And flung a muffled voice, and ever sent
Great reaching waves towards the charmèd land
Charged with a splendid ruin.

This the soul
For whom fair Eros in his loveliest mood
Had whispered four years long his phantasies.

How few amongst us guess the hidden depths
Of our own nature! Fewer still who think
Upon the chances in a brother soul;
And few, again, who learn a reverence
Which sets restraining instincts on the watch
To guard the steps, lest these should violate
Homesteads of secret thought in others' minds.

Full oft intrusions of some errant foot
Within the shy seclusion of dim shades

Disclose the warm sequestered nests that lay
Hidden in an unbroken peacefulness,
There startle to cold death the stirring life
And leave an ever desolated hush,
Where haply little singing-birds had reared
New sweet-voiced broods to bring perennial spring
Of lyric loveliness within their nook.

Now, Clement Dorme, in whom there was no harm,
Save that which comes from calling all day long
"No harm! No harm!" amongst the idle hours,
Had broken on the maiden's privacy,
Had sunned himself four years in her kind smile;
And in his thoughtlessness had drawn her soul,
Her fresh deep nature, to him, to fill up
A pause that broke the fullness of his days.
But for the costly gift of her whole self
He brought her nothing precious in return.
The subtle pleasure served to pass the time
While he, perplexed by much of personal care,
Was waiting for a long-delaying tide
Of lingering events; and when the swell
Of this expected change should set afloat
His little argosies, he too would sail,
And with his easy thanks would say "Farewell."

But never more a glad surprise of song
From sweet-toned nightingales shall wake her night,
Nor voice of wood-dove touch her darkened day
With tender rays of peace, nor happy moods
With mellow changes lighten her sad eyes
On whom the burden of the parting falls.

For she, of their relation each to each
Thought on this wise. She dreamt not the sweet dream
About the glad bride honour, and the strange
Deep joy of the new home, as maidens do;
She judged her life and Dorme's were linked by thought
And gravest sympathy; conceived that both
Trod the same road to ever higher ends;
And leaned upon his greater strength, and took
His natural masculine nerve for mental force
Beyond all hope of hers. Thus reverently
She magnified his nature to a god's;
And with a trembling effort, she assailed
A difficult and upward-mounting path
With willing, tender, and thorn-piercèd feet,
Dreaming she followed him.

But there had come
A visionary guidance to her soul
From thoughts whose white wing never brushed his brow.

Then oftentimes, at nights, she offered up
Her votive prayers upon a shrine of love,
And felt a mast'ring flow of passion break
The prisoned self within her, and transfuse
Her soul with fervours from the primal time;
And since the soul must loose itself in words,
Or cast itself on action that feels much,
She flung her all in one strong passionate thought
Whose ardour knew no bounds in sacrifice,
And prayed, without a pause upon the cost,
Or scarcely noting that the cost was there,
That all his dearest wishes be fulfilled,

And that her friendship prove its worth to him.

And never since "God bless you" first was said
By lips that made the words a living force
With true heart strength, did such a sweet "Good-night,"
Wander on wings of love's glad messengers
To whisper peace and blessing to the ears
Of him for whom the simple prayer was given.

The unbiassed world, which makes its measurements
With two-foot rules of grim exactitude,
Suspected Dorme of no great depth of soul,
Nor wound a pitcher down an empty well
In expectation of a copious draught.
His nature, full of brisk activities,
Spurned at the thoughtful life; he would have made
In times of lesser scope a hunting squire;
But all the happy ease of modern days,
The means of gracious culture, and the need
Of working out of all that came, the best,
(Which like a suit of armour guarded him)
Had led him, through his early college years,
And in the leisured hours which he could cull
From days spent in the grave pursuit of law,
To reading books with something of true zeal.
He had a zest for those philosophies
Which simplify our lives and can translate
The diverse heart-throbs of the asking soul,
The tumult of aims multitudinous
And fraught with great events, to one of two
Little blind impulses told in a word.
This plain elucidation of our life

That swept so neatly off all mystery,
Convinced a mind like Dorme's, a mind that sought
A firm good footing in an easeful world
And meant to choose his place judiciously.

And yet, from Milicent, he sometimes caught
A glow such as surprises eastern clouds
Ranged in cold distance from the western fires.
Then he believed, perchance some mystery
Surrounded our small life, and folded it
In stronger circles of another life,
And that we lay within,—as new-born babes
Lie in the mother-breast conceiving not
Amongst their soft sensations, petulant
Quick pains and little needs, what passion-depths,
What throes have tossed them to this unexplored
And shrinking fear of being; nor again
To splendours of what feeling this may lead.

He felt the spell of mystic thoughts like these
In rare and fleeting moments when his friend's
Persuasive influence had mastered him;
It was all one as when our ears have lent
Their sense unto a symphony of sound
That lifts us, half unwilling, to a realm
Other than this our day. And then his eyes
Would darken with their feeling, and his face,—
Rich with the beauty of Italia's sons
Nurtured amidst the loveliness of art
And Nature's spendthrift mood of sunny joy,—
Was glorified, as beauty lightly is,
By any ripple from emotion's wave.

But Milicent beheld such change with awe
Feeling some cloud from heavens she could not reach
Touched now his brow. She had no faintest dream
That but the brooding shadow of her soul
Had cast its magic spell upon his face.
She held his look a title page to thoughts
Ever unread by her. So of his art
And his philosophies! Those chambers trim,
Those little squares of learning, she adjudged
To be as arches o'er a temple's door
Whose airy roofs concealed grave mysteries
Alas! unknown to her; and, following still,
That colonnades of majesty swept on
Opening to landscapes, wildernesses wild
Of grandest thought and far out-stretching aims.
And she?—she waited with a folded wing
For words as from a Delphic oracle.

Thus for long months in tenderest nearness kept
These stranger minds, and ne'er attained to touch;
At times a cold speech to poor Milicent,
A careless answer, warned her shivering sense
That not from words misapprehension came;
'Twas not that he had missed the melody
From an ill-chosen phrase, but that the airs
Flung from her ever music-haunted heart,
Found no response because his ear was dull.

But then the darkened falsely-seeming depths
Of eyes that could but look in beauty's way,
Lulled back her soul to dreams.

Clement himself,
With quick unbiassed and unclouded sense,
Perceived the difference, felt their souls remote;
Or rather, Milicent set her aims so high
They simply, by himself, were unconceived;
He merely knew she had not found the mode
To please him utterly. He thought her words
With want of due proportion sometimes jarred,
Was stirred, bewildered, often half annoyed
And quite amused. He spent the after hours
Sunning himself in warmth of mother earth,
Or threw away in active pastimes all
Those strange impressions the weird maiden left
To haunt him, like the scents from flower-filled woods
That follow the quick traveller on his way.

At times a whimsical, half-satisfied,
Slow smile crept in his face. He thought 'twas sure
That Milicent could love him;—well! that she
(Misjudging here, how much, her purer mind)
Would gladly slip her arduous straining life
Into a nest of easy wealth, and share
The pleasant days of Dorme, of Old Dorme Hall.
But then, since Clement Dorme was gently born,
Since courtesies whole generations long
Of noble natures ran within his veins,
He checked himself in anger; scorned the mood
That played thus lightly with a maiden's dreams;
Measured his slighter nature with a gauge
Taken from Milicent's, and went away
Somewhat in soul abashed; or at the most
He shunned a thought which sent a prosy care

To show, with austere hand, how leads his path
Through the sweet perils which he loves to risk.

Now, since they met, four times had they beheld
The summer passing with its flower-filled days;
And ever had he kept a thoughtful care
O'er her unsullied innocence; he knew
That world by which she set but slighting store
Loved bitter gossip and the words that hurt,
So guarded her from compromise, and went
Ostensibly to visit that grave man,
Her father, who, deep buried in his books,
Scarce was aware that Milicent's slim form
Like a quiet shadow flitted round the house
And in and out the room, as shadows play
Pursued by sunlight on a breezy morn.

And thus the weeks had run their lengths away,
And trembled into silent dreamy things,
Until that evening hour when Milicent
Watched while the summer shadows wound a veil
About the drooping eyelids of the day.

II.

"Oh! that floating adown, adown,
As a ring-dove to its nest,
Or as a creamy petal blown
To the limpid well's deep breast,
Or as the shaded cloud to the light
In the tired face of the moon,
Or as dews dropped from the finger of night
Where the drouthèd lilies swoon,—
Oh! that, as these, thou wouldst softly come,
Thou shy ethereal thought,
And fold thy wing in the ready home
Which the strength of the heart hath wrought.

THE lapsing hours reveal by slow degrees
Life's secrets to us; and these shall not come
With welcome aspect of expected friends,
But, wearing garbs of manifold surprise,
Too often, in our calm security,
They strike upon us like an ambushed foe.

Trellised by branching trees, the amber west
Still peeped from night's dusk mantle. But a sound
All unforetold, in music broke the quiet,
And shattered silence with a thousand notes
Of low vibrating joys. Only a step
That trod the garden gravel—but 'twas Dorme's!
And something in the heart that heard it, caught
The gentle sound and turned it into song.

He brought a happy rush of life; the maid
Essayed to hold her mien of former calm
And contemplative quiet; but then her eyes
Shone soft as stars that smile above a mist
Of rosy-tinted cloud and dream of heaven.

He pressed her fingers in the clasp that tells
Of warmest friendship, while his eye surveyed,

Through opened panes, the widening landscape spread
A page of twilight peace. And then his glance
Lighting upon the papers scattered near,
Like fallen blossoms where a windy morn
Hath idly caught them, with a flitting smile
He touched them, gently asking: "What new song,
O Milicent, Sweet Singer, have you won
Out of the coverts of your fragrant mind?
Shake me the petals of your flow'ret down
To fall against my breast; and let me feel
A little spirit touch soft opening there
A gate of sighs to find myself so small,
So merely commonplace!" Half petulant,
She gathered up her leaves. "You like them not!
Indifferently you judge of these, I know;
For me—I sing! And you—you linger long!
There's that has held you with enchanted spell!
A work—perchance a purpose half divine,
Unknown to me, has won these tardying weeks!"

Passing his hand across his face he seemed
To chase a growing shadow thence; and said:
"Yes! 'work' has kept me; and I come to say
That new 'work' lies before me,—if the word
Be not a little cumbrous for my case."

"Thus hide you still," she said, "some fair design;
We girls sit idle, envying happy men
Who ponder of the best in thought and act,
And then as champions of a noble cause,
Push on to fight the Hydras of our day,
And failing or succeeding use themselves

In manful cleansing of some patch of earth,
Some harbouring spot of ill."

He showed himself
Annoyed, and turned and answered: "There you set
Once more the cause of difference 'twixt us twain.
You see gold pieces in bright farthings still!
For me, you know philosophy has calmed
These ardours of the over-generous mind.
I hold 'tis best to let this world alone,
Nor set our childish efforts to oppose
Or alter Nature's slow persisting course
And law inexorable. Can you think
That aims of yours will work to solid ends,
And better what seems ill? This huge machine
Takes, with no nice discrimination, both
Your conscious virtue and the conscious crime
That teems about the dunghills of the earth;
And with its slowly grinding teeth, works all
As good material to other ends
Than what we have conceived. The good, the ill,
Both have their use within a various world,
Then let us leave the working of things out
To this indifferent slow-evolving Time;
Nor meddle, where we never can attain
To alter or advance a cold grim law."

"But man," she answered, "in himself has power;
Or rather, there's some magnet draws him up
With painful throes towards a higher sphere.
We work not with indifference; for we feel
The spectre of past failure armed with whips,

Hurling us from our yesterdays of sin;
The while alluring hope still makes us crave
To reach that morrow when our quickened will,
The servant of a wisdom purged and true,
Shall leave no instant of a poor delay
Before it coin to silver-ringing deeds
What it hath seen of truth and love for men!"

He smiled and answered her: "Poor little man
Entangled in his nature's fateful mesh!
This Progress is the mere and equal force
Of Nature's common dealings with the race.
How can we picture here a lower or higher?
'Tis only that, according to our light,
We follow still the best expediency,
Urged in self-interest to extend the range
Of blessing to the others of our kind.
'Tis knowledge brings at last these tolerant days
When, with admitted half apology,
In self-defence we slay the criminal.
He, unenlightened still, works after all
With aims sprung from the self-same source as ours;
He seeks for happiness in ignorance; we
Seek it for wider circles, in wise ways."

'Twas anger deepened now her flushing cheek
And lit her eyes with an indignant fire.
"Clement! You hurt with your philosophy!"

He forward leaned with wistful winning looks
And melting smile. For Clement Dorme possessed

That narrow and quick sympathy that feels
The lesser pain and weakness of mankind,
And ever lays on these a healing hand;
Of all the windings of the higher mind,
The delicate harmonics of the soul,
He formed but slight conception; and herein
In life-inspiring sympathy he failed.

His mild appeal for her forgiveness drew
A quick relenting glance. "I know your acts
Heap shame upon your words! How many deeds
Of generous help to others you set down
To cancel this cold calculating creed!
'Tis I who err! You have the deeper mind
That sees in criminals a little germ
Lie latent of good hope. If this be so,
If all the diverse aims and aches of life,
From low to high, are but a modified
Self-interest, self-defence, or what you will,
(The leap of Curtius in the yawning gulf,
The Spartans dying at Thermopylæ,
The many thousand heroisms of earth,
Being one with dash of lions on their prey
Or flight of timid quarry to their holes),
Thank God, that what is base can rise so high,
Grow, like the little useless-seeming seed,
To trees that spread their shadowing branches forth
And shelter life and bless. How great and good
This wise economy of Nature's is! What hope!
We, from our desolation, may look up
And know our life's long issue is not meant
To fade away in death. Is nothing lost

Of this low mud? And yet our noble pain,
Our passion and our effort is a mock,—
The laughter of a Universe of Love?"

"Ah, Milicent! You still translate my words
By glowing metaphors! Turn hence your face
Or else I shall believe the angels still
Bring down unearthly inspirations here
To startle our calm lives. My Singer Sweet!
My Saint Cecilia!"

"You mock at me?"

"Not so. My humble thanks are for the small
And real mercies;—that we have the will,
The most of us, to seek for others' good,
And guide our feet by rules that hereward tend.
Setting aside exploded theories
Of supernatural guidance from the case,
I judge right action lies but in that course
Which spreads the widest benefits around,
The widest benefits and highest too.
'Tis we ourselves, by our experience,
Have framed this code of rules to guide our lives.
To me, 'tis not impossible to see
That right were wrong if, following on its heels,
It brought disaster to the general race;
Or otherwise, that wrong again were right
If we could prove and see effects of good.
How say you, Milicent! Could you work out
Your ardent loving thought to finer ends?
Fulfil your hunger for self-sacrifice

In real measure? Tell me! You would write,
To save a life, or, if you will, a *soul*,
Upon the innocent page of your white mind
One little lie?"

He simply spoke in jest.
But she, low musing, answered on this wise:
"I hold that Right is higher than our needs.
No more we made these laws than made the force
That keeps our earth fast tethered to the sun.
Nor was Right made for us alone. Our acts
Have range beyond our dreams and wind to ends
Remote from our short ken, being widely caught
In heaven-extended meshes. And, I know,
To cast our own and dearer other lives
In noble faith on what we've learnt of good
And lowly leave the consequence, is all
The wisdom that our darkness can attain."

A musical still pause flowed on these words
And hushed their breath. Something, she knew not why,
Gave them an import of prophetic depth.
Perchance, some mild recording angel there
Wrote with a lucid pencil in a book.
But we our own recording angels are.
Words uttered unaware may seem as fires
Lit suddenly for beacons to the soul;
And justly spoken sentences of truth
Wait, like the hidden stars through hours of light,
To leap out for the soul when all is dark.

From Milicent, a tremulous low sigh,

A quiver of the warm unwilling nerve,
Showed that some prescient instinct shook her frame.
She lifted up her eyes and saw the moon
Hang like a spectral lamp behind the tree,
And heard the sleepy whisper of the leaves
Answer the night's faint footfall, while the wind,
Suddenly wakened, fled between the shades
Of two weird poplars like a homeless ghost,
And left the air like death.

Dorme turned and spoke.
"I know not how it is that I should come
And lay my burdens on you, Milicent.
But there's a sorrow troubles me to-night,
As it has troubled me this many a day,
And gives me leave to speak."

Her heart stood still;
So strangely seemed her heavy-shaken sigh
To draw already on a train of woe.

How quick we are to think the title page
Of grief's new book contains our sum of pain
In one heart-breaking sentence, picturing not
How ruefully the slow, slow chapters wind
Towards painful consummation and the close
Of flickering hope. And in young energy
We grapple with our dolour, with intent
To conquer this our enemy and win
Laurels by hasty victory. And lo!
Our sorrow with the mild sad eyes again
Upon the wearying way confronts our steps,

And lifts the cup of fate's persistent ill
Anew to our pale lips. She will not cease
Her dreaded importunity ; her will
Is that we drink and shrink not ; that we take
Her hand in mildest faith and follow her.
For lo ! She holds the secret of our lives !
She hath the hidden casket of our joy !
And in our ear she whispers words of peace,
Strange words and hard at first to understand,
But flowing with full-measured melody.
Thank God for joy and ease and all things fair
That can the soul beguile to happy smiles ;
But know, if thou wouldst cull of rarer bliss
The wild aroma, it is Sorrow's self
That brings the flower and lays it to thy cheek.

Milicent felt that the uncertain joy
Of years was fading in a mist of change.
Finding no words, she turned her watchful eyes
On Clement's face. He bent his head, and asked :
" Milicent, tell me,—for all men have signs
By which the world describes them—*who am I*,
Your long familiar friend ? "

Startled, she paused ;
Then sent her words in hurry of surprise :
" You ask me your own name ? 'Tis Clement Dorme ;
And "—for he lifted now expectant looks
Upon her speech—" you are, as all men know,
The son of Ulric Dorme, of Old Dorme Hall.
What ! More ? You are his heir, the greatest man
In social standing in the country round.

But all these things are nothing"—Here she stayed;
So wan, so white, the little wistful smile,
That broke the strange appearance of a tear!
She could have wept to see it. But he turned
And with his hand quick pointing to the moon
Asked: "Can you see that little curling cloud
That hangs about her like a happy dream,
Nestling in light and soft security?"
And then, "Draw back this curtain, lean within,
So lies a grateful shadow 'twixt us twain
As I begin my tale." His hand disposed
The curtain as he wished; but she could see
The little curling cloud slip from the moon
And wander into dark and homeless space.

"'Tis true, I am the son of Ulric Dorme;
'Tis true, that he designs me for his heir;
But right to be his heir and bear his name,
Milicent, *I have none.* Ah! can you guess?
Are these the stories for a maiden's ear?"

He paused. A moment of tumultuous doubt
Whether she heard aright, or whether now
Something had mocked her sense! And then there came
Remembrance of the pain that men can feel
Who hold not in a crystal memory
The name of 'Mother.' "Yes; tell all to me."
Her voice was like the swaying of sweet reeds
For tenderness.

"There falls a weight of years,"

He sighed, " since first my father told me all,
Making within my garden of delight
A secret place where bitter herbs might grow
Nurtured by galling thought. My mother died
Long since in the fair land where I was born ;
Under her own Italian sunny sky
They led me my first years, and let me drink
The richness of that vine-enchanted air.
My mother is no memory for me
So long ago she died ; my father said,
He loved and honoured her with worship still ;
And then he laid his hand upon my hair
And whispered : 'Clement, never do thou wrong
The woman whom thou lovest ; no strong love,
No tenderness avails to make amends
For wrong like this ; the many-chambered heart
Reserves unconquered spaces which Love hunts
And hunts in vain ; and there it is there hides
The one ascendant master of the soul.
No love of mine availed to touch that place ;
I saw her eyes hold hidden thoughts from me,
I knew that nearer to her heart they lay
Than mine own image ; and they stole her hence ;
She faded like my fairest dream, and died.'"

After a pause that stifled tears would make,
Low answered Milicent : " I see not why
A place of bitter herbs should mar your land ;
This was a noble soul who once had erred !
And if your father keep his cherished love,
And hang with worship on her memory,
Then you the same—who only learn from him.

I speak in ignorance, and yet, to me,
She seems Love's martyr."

But with light assent
He put her words away, as though they brought
An unconsidered trifle to his view.
"This touches not my own calamity!
Think Milicent! I hold these lands, this place,
Merely on suff'rance at my father's will,
Not as my right, not, as it should have been,
As Dorme of Dorme. Ah! a mere accident,
A word, a whisper, could reveal the truth
To all the curious, grinning, hideous world."

A silence fell between them, thronged with thought.
For Milicent's quick sympathy had strayed
To those long years ago and conjured up,
From Dorme's few words, a picture in her brain;
She seemed to see the lovely lady's face,
Between the branching tendrils of a vine,
With mournful eyes (that had the far-off look)
Following the wild wing of a soaring dove
That lost itself in light. She almost felt
The low beat of the heart, and heard the tears
Drop inwardly upon a wounded place
That never more could heal.

But then Dorme spoke:
"One drop of consolation is vouchsafed
Within my bitter cup; she was, indeed,
Of noble birth, her blood as blue as ours;
No base plebeian cross has marred our race.

But oh! an outcast I! No name! No name!
Held here on suff'rance by a father's love,
And not my own good right."

She answered him,
While wonder chilled her tone, "Is it not well
To know the full wealth of a father's love?
Is it not better to take all these gifts
As largess from that tender eager hand
Than coldly as your right? Are not you blessed
In this more than are others?" But she saw
Impatience on his face, and gently said:
"I, living in my dreams, can scarcely know
In full how this may touch you; but, for you,
Rests here true sympathy for any grief."

Smiling—"And this it is that leads me here!
You wrong me when you think I value not
My father's love and care. But let me bring
My story to its close; for tales like this
Begun in some far distant past, wind on
To slow fulfilment, and touch innocent lives
With undeserved blight; we cannot shut
The secret past down in the buried years,
Nor long-rued deeds undo, nor with the will,
However forceful, can we change at last
The working out of any fatal fact
That mars existence."

"This is true," she said,
"And yet facts touched by humble reverent hands

Show different aspects, and may strangely turn
To benediction."

"Such ideal hopes,"
He answered, "avail nothing where the stress
Of life is heavy. And my father still
Broods o'er his secret grief; his mind has grown
Warped with a long sad musing, till he sees
The future only as a Nemesis
Coming towards him with a mocking face
To cancel every effort to atone,
And blazon out the mystery to the world.
He knows no safety from his secret dread!
Plain to his eye a judgment seems to stand
Before him on the path, hotly prepared.
He fears, with all the pride of ancient blood,
The marring of the noble name of Dorme,
And asks himself how he shall carry it
As the unbroken symbol of his race
From out the turmoil of these shadowy foes,
Bringing it safely through the stress of days
Whose weary moments press upon his brain.
But more than this. Most anxiously he aims
To save her cherished honour, whose fair face
Hangs in the portrait gallery of Dorme
Amongst the pictures of some prouder dames
But none so beautiful! And, for myself,
He would prevent these secret torturing facts
From crushing me,—would bring the glory back,
And leave me free of care. Years long, the ache
Of these anxieties has beat his brain,
And scared away his peace."

"But is there not
Some way to render you your natural rights,"
She asked, "and may not silence close the doors
Upon your hidden fears?"

And then he told
That with his aid alone, being skilled in law,
His father had writ out a curious Will
Wrapt round in saving words: so that no phrase
Explained the truth, yet every phrase stood guard
Upon the facts, delivering his son
From all the evils of their consequence.
And since the Will was strong, ev'n to his mind,
Now was his aching fear of some design
To rob him of his testament. Full oft
He visited the cabinet where lay
The parchment; saw the good clear writing spread
Refreshment to his eye; and kept the key
With him, both day and night with jealous hand,
Taking some sorry comfort from these deeds.

Two only, out of all the world beside,
Had knowledge of the secret; and these two—
A father and his child—were next of kin;
With them the mystery was safe; their pride
Laid a restraining hand upon their lips;
And, since the Will made firm the barrier
Against the child's succession, silence closed
The secret that so marred their mutual race.
And for the last,—lest any blow should make
The good Will null, and leave the family
As a cleft tree to show a sudden end,

Old Dorme had trained his son to bear that fate ;
Law for his following had he made him take,
And now he conjured him to struggle hard
Like any poor aspirant for a name,
And thus, lest worse befall, to make himself
In measure independent of the place
His birthright should have given. "This it is,"
Said Clement, "sets me daily to my task.
I can earn thus a narrow competence,
Have some position, though the whole of Dorme
Slip through my hands at last. But have you not
Marvelled to see me work?"

Wondering, she spoke :
"That you should work was but the sign to me
Of a more earnest nature than is found
In common among rich expectant heirs ;
I sought no other motive!"

But he mused
A space, making no answer ; and the pause
That bore them to the mighty realm of thought
Was their divider ; for their souls fell back
Each from the other to a separate place,
And, though their eyes perused the self-same sky,
The fleeting clouds were writ with different words
For spirits wide asunder.

One by one
From out the twilight peeped the jewel stars,
And one by one the starlike flowers of earth

Drooped heavy-eyed among the conquering shades;
But to the waiting heart of Milicent,
Came every opal tint of eventide,
And every silent shadow weighted full
With thrills of strange emotion and of fate.

III.

Between the passionless morning and the eve
The foot of Love trod softly all the day,
And where his steps their tender traces leave
Waked fairest blooms along the chosen way.

But when Night hung her signal in the sky,
Love saw the star and opened wide his wings,
He floated slowly upwards with a sigh,
And swept his pinions out in fiery rings.

He poised in silence o'er the golden hour
That trembled into rapture unaware,
Till every instant thrilled beneath his power,
And fled away in music on the air.

There wandered from his perfect lips a word
That echoed in a living heart anon;
Then, as the dulcet dying of a chord,
The unspent wonder faded and was gone.

NESTLING within the dear accustomed ways
Before change thrust us with his diamond spear
Urging us onward,— and before the shock
Of the irrevocable trembling down
To shiver in a thousand blinded stars
What seemed our common light, and leave a pall
Of night upon our noon,—before this come,
With what assurance do we tread the way!
What innocence of hope lifts high the lamp
Where with our twilight thoughts we seek the shades
Beloved of melancholy, and o'ertired
With happy weights of day, get leave to muse
And weave our spangled dreams in dusky caves
Of pleasant self-sought sadness.

This seems Life,
Until the actual with its rough-shod feet
Accost us on the way. Glad may we be
If from the fine-spun web of rare ideals
We gather some firm fabric of fair thought,
Bearing it with us through inclement days
To be our pilgrim cloak.

Change once begun,
Leads on in solemn march through varied lands

And thrusts us on to strange experiences;
Until no more the green-clad hills of youth
Lengthen their shadows towards our tardying feet,
Nor even the rills from which we quenched our thirst
O'erlave the banks with their old freshening wave,
But lose themselves, and wander from our ken,
And bear their echoes with them from our ears
That yearn in vain.

Oh! memories of Hope,
That haunt us now like shadows and pale ghosts
Shaking us midst the glare of day with fear
And omened warning, with what radiant touch
Your hands once thrilled us! How your lovely looks
Were their own pledges in their beauteousness
Of full completion! And the prophecy
Was just the perfect rounding of our thought
That could not fail of finish! When came change
To shake apart the pieces, that no more
Can any skill unite? Too sad, too sad,
If this were all, to drag a mangled being
Through ebbing tides of slowly moving years
Unto sheer death. Oh! sights and sounds of Life
Give leave that we may linger for awhile
Among your fairest, and drink full the heart
With satisfaction and a deep content.

O'ershadowing change was nearing Milicent,
Who sat, still confident, midst lovely dreams,
And only felt the shocks of sorrow break
Like thunderous waves upon a sunny cove,

Sent as the messengers of far off storms
To quiet waters. All her heart was full
Of Clement's story, and she watched him now
With freshly springing interest; for a face,
Well conned of old, keeps yet a novel spell
When any revelation sets anew
The features midst illuminating rays.
Why had he spoken, who had kept so long
Unbroken silence? But the question slipped
Away in gladness that he should speak now,
And let her share a little in his grief,—
Rendering chivalric trust. Her heart vowed fast,
Amidst the gathering gloom and lengthened pause,
A passionate faithfulness; she partly yearned
For some hard service, wherein she might pour
The pathos of this tenderness and mist
Of wistful sympathy. What worth had love
Unless it wrought in acts?

And with the words
Her love leapt suddenly to conscious life,
And stood, a wide-winged god, before her eyes
Revealed in beauty; as great Eros once
To the o'er-curious Psyche stood revealed
One blissful instant. And she recognised
The close companion of fair dreamy years,—
The never parting angel of her side.

Yet all the time her small pale face was pressed
Against those crimson curtaining folds his hand
Had placed around her; and she was so still
That only by the flitting lights that passed

Across her eyes, could any read the signs
Of great emotion in her.

Clement's face,
Uplifted to the waning light of day,
Wore a strange pensive tenderness. He seemed
Wrapt and absorbed in thoughts that kept the quiet
Lingering about them. Their two souls were poised
Each in its own emotion, light transformed
By radiating beams; and any word
Passing between them like an alien thing
Might break the spell. 'Twas thus at last he turned,
And speaking slowly said: "There is a way
Which, could we reach it, can make good this flaw."

His hesitating voice dropped suddenly
And fell away in murmurs, as the wind
That waits a little, lets the idle leaves,
Mimicking the low whisper of the waves,
Fall back into repose upon the tree.
She waited for the next, in faint surprise
Turning attentive looks; and he went on:
"Tell me, dear Milicent, have you not heard
The name of Viola Blount?"

A sudden chill
Stole apprehension dimly on her heart,
And made her happy thoughts lift up their wings
To flee away, like lingering swallows driven
By autumn's coldest blast. Why should he speak
This foolish stranger name? and why break up
By commonplaces thus, the wondrous calm

And silence of their pause? Her memory,
Unwilling, groped amongst far schoolgirl days,
And with a faint dislike she conjured up
What Viola had been;—a placid face,
Voice of thin quality incessantly
Urging prosaic platitudes; some sense,
Prim pleasantness, and mild persistency
In getting what she would. Yes, Milicent
Could recollect her well. And silently
She signed to Dorme that Viola was held
Within her memory; yet scattered flights
Of peaceful joys still made their pinions heard
Low sweeping through the utmost skirts of mind
As though departing. Therefore, while she signed,
She held as in abeyance the strange pain,
The meaning of whose dark approach, not yet
Her mind could fully grasp; and in light words,
At variance with her feeling, spoke: "We met
In those far off and narrow days, when I,
Outwardly pliant, but alas! in truth
A most exasperate spirit, agonized
Within the mild and safe enclosing fold
Of schoolgirl discipline. And once, of late,
I chanced upon her, standing midst a group
Of poor souls wearying through an afternoon
At Lady Graham's."

In saying this, she thought
With cold annoy, how Viola that day
Had, with a careless-seeming voice, inquired:
"Did not her neighbourhood boast Old Dorme Hall?
Was she therewith acquainted?" After that

Came little crafty words designed to draw
Ingenuous admissions, questions slipped
At random to extract a facile speech
In answer. All the time had Viola
With no frank word explained, or if she knew
Or knew not Clement.

But his answer brought
The moment when her half foreseeing mind
Should learn the heart of woe. The morning hour
Had seen her rise to walk amongst her ways
Of household duty—and the thousand things
That beautified her life with wholesome deeds—
Filled with the happiness of hopeful love,
Whose clinging power had wound itself among
The memory of years. The evening sky
Beheld a hand of desolating truth
Erase in pain the memory of hope
From out these years, and with a fiery touch
Thrust the unerring darts of anguish where,
Close at the core of all, soft nestles joy
In innocent trust.

Dorme spoke with lowest voice :
"If you have seen her, you have seen the one
Who holds my life's fate in her two white hands."
A word may carry such sharp shafts of woe
It overshoots sensation's keenest mark
By an excess of pain. She idly watched
A shadow blot a patch of moonlight out
Within her room ; then, like a dying rose,

Her fragrant head drooped suddenly, and swayed
With heavy movement downwards.

Dorme went on:
"You've heard that Viola is an only child?
Her mother was a Dorme, and after me
She is my father's heir. As the law holds
She is the real heiress of these lands,
Only my father's Will breaks up her claim;
And when he told me all, he bade me go
And see if I could love and marry her,
For then were all made good."

He paused again,
And idly leaning on the window ledge
Stooped low to pull a spray of eglantine
That climbed too near. A mist was o'er her eyes,
But she could see the darkly perfect face
Cold-carved against the moon. She speaking not,
He took the phrase again:

"It is some years
Since first upon this strange love quest I went;
Years long enough to prove to me how slow
A wooing is! I loved her from the first—
Her pleasant ways, to me like summer shades
Are to the bending fern. I wooed her then,
And at the last I won. But, Milicent,
Though from the first I think she favoured me,
Not so her father; all the pride of birth
In one who, of the line of Blount himself,

Had wedded with a Dorme, rebelled in wrath
Against his daughter marrying with a man
Who bears (except in courtesy) no name.
In vain it was I played upon the fact
That I had wealth to give, and he was poor,
His lands by entail tyrannously tied;
I made my fair love stand before his mind
Like the poor beggar maid of ancient song
Clad in her threadbare garb, and then I heaped
My treasures round her. But it was in vain;
He turned a page of genealogy
Where, midst a desert of indiff'rent names
Her own sweet Violet looked softly out,
And lent some gladness to the dreary tome.
But now, at length, with mine her mingled prayers
Have won this much consent; after a year,
If we are faithful—if her heart still go
With all my wishes—he himself will yield;
Only that year I leave my love and home
And put dividing seas betwixt us twain."

He waited, as expecting some response;
Then watched the gradual changes of the sky
To deepening night; and in a softened mood
Of fond self-pity, felt how sweet it was
To find that life could send an innocent friend
To bear with him some brunt of all this pain,
And tender him a ready sympathy
With so much meekness, that it almost seemed
A kindness to receive it. He went on

With a soft sigh as from a mimic grief.
"Hard measure this! And harder, Milicent,
Because my father, beaten by the ache
Of long anxiety, grows ill and weak.
His constant harping on the hidden Will
Affects me strangely. What if death should strike
Ere this be settled! What if she should change—
But this I fear not! Only, Milicent,
To ask your aid I come; you are so good—
A woman to be near whom one may feel
A little better—tell me, Milicent,
You'll do one thing for me? Say! may I write
Long letters to you, telling all my life?
And will you, since you know her—for indeed
She said you knew her—will you carry them
And give my news to her? So we shall keep
A little link. You speak not! But you'll do
This favour for me? Tell me! I must say
Good-bye without a word?"

He leaned again
In his kind winning way towards the nook
In which she nestling hid her pallid face.
Shaken from deadly faintness by some power
That seemed to reach her like a warning touch,
She answered in her pure pathetic voice:
"Indeed, I'll do this thing."

There seemed no need
For further words. She heaved these from her heart
Like a great solemn pledge from out the depths
Of joy ineffable and grief profound

In one short evening fathomed. Through the dark
He only saw her earnest eyes were set
With such solemnity upon his face
They thrilled and startled him. And some strange power,
As with a finger laid on fluent lips,
Softly restrained his speech. With falling voice
He murmured out a commonplace of thanks,
Then took a forward step, and touched her hand,
And gently left. He knew the faithful heart
Was as a rock to trust to, therefore went
Down through the dew-filled garden, with a mind
Lightened of trouble. And the darkness took
The last sign of his form, and covered it.

For Night was come—Night conscious of the stars,
Earth unentangled, and dispassionate—
And opened up her wings of distant peace,
And breathed her voiceless promise. And the spheres
Rejoicing knew it; while the troubled Earth,
Forlornly robbed of vision, heard the tread
Of mighty life around, and lifted up
Her blind sun-dazzled eyes to where the worlds
Glow with the steady flame of their own being;
And felt, in realms of grand reality,
The foolish fever of the day disperse.

The maiden's heart grew still; she sat and watched
The mute approaches of the gathering dark,
The fleeing of the moonlight-hunted clouds,
The many secret wonders of the hour,
For a long wearying while. Then she arose

Thinking to reach her couch. But suddenly
She flung her two arms up above her head,
And, with a moaning cry that scarcely seemed
To issue from her lips, she shivering fell
To the cold floor. And lo! the storms of life
Swept in their might upon the fallen flower.

IV.

Thou dost not know her! Thou dost shrink to see
The face through that uncertain folding veil?
Yet fear no more!
This is thy Sorrow. This was born for thee,
Thy gift from Life. I charge thee, do not fail
To learn her priceless lore.

Mistake her not! She scarcely knows to hide
Beneath that mourning garb, her shining wings.
She holds a key,
Wherewith thou shalt unlock the doors and slide
The barriers back that guard the mystic things
Inviolate for thee.

Lo! what Life brings thee! Not the foolish choice,
But what the stored-up ages have designed
And have fore-known;
And what thy Spirit with its deeper voice
Hath asked of Heaven, and thy illumined mind
Hereafter claims alone.

Think not Fate cheats thee. For a messenger
From other climes, with feet new-bathed in fire,
Hath come to thee!
Disclaim her not; it is alone from her
Thou hast the promise of thy prime desire
And passion's victory.

NEW-RISING morn outspreads her sunny wing,
And runs her buoyant laughter through the air
That droops with languors of the heavy dark
And lingering; and after nights of storm
Behold the day with unperturbèd eye
Surveys the scene, and sends her temperate ray
To pass with tender, exquisite, light touch
O'er all the chaos of the ruined heaps,
In beauty healing them anew. This calm
Fair fashion of the nature heart is not
Indiff'rence, but the symbol of a love
That holds a tender yet invisible hand
Upon the human heart-ache, to assure
The broken life of wholeness and of hope
Existent somewhere in this universe.

And so the morrow dawned for Milicent,
And many morrows after; and the sun,
That with undeviating steadfastness
Rose in its course, instilled into her soul
A like obedience, bade her raise her head
And live, pale storm-drenched creature, though her wing
Were beaten with disaster; and her heart—
Faint with slow life—gave out its every pulse
With conscious effort.

But the need to live
In us is very strong, else quicker deaths
Would come to ease our ineffectual pain.
The careless heel that crushed the roaming bee,
At innocent work about a flowery world,
Hath not sufficed to kill it, and it creeps
(Poor, mangled, soft, brown thing) to those near blooms
And meagre greennesses which limit now
Its choice of honey, and its broken flight.
So Milicent, an exile from her realm
Of over-flowing love and fancy's joy,
Put out her timid soul towards little deeds
Of kindness and of ruthful sympathy.
Our own hard sorrows bring us to the gate
That opens the world path of serious life.
And down the earthly ways the maiden went
Faltering and weak, and making little show
Of great intent, but speaking a soft word
Where trouble was apparent, smiling out
A quiet encouragement where grief availed
To make a reach at hope ; or, with a face
Of gentle awe, held back her mourning robes
Away from joy, and stood awhile apart
With looks of benediction gladly spent.

'Twas on this wise that quiet made its way
To her perturbèd spirit, and laid down
The rich beginnings of a throne of peace.
After some broken weeks of aching pain
That ran like constant nightmare through her mind,
And after the dull struggle of her pride
To heap its arduous task of cheerfulness

Upon the heart that asked but leave to weep,
She wandered one mild basking afternoon
Along the emerald lanes, and midst the scents
Of ripening wayside fruits, and tender ferns
That keep the smell of earth quick piercing through
Their pleasant shoots new-curling from the ground;
And there, beneath an ample sweep of field,
A low brook hastened in its murmured joy,
To slip beneath the many leaning shrubs
That made a sanctuary of happy peace
For its sweet garrulous course. And near the wood
She saw a swinging gate, and passing through,
Where the cropped grass and trampled cattle hoofs
Gave witness of some lately driven herds,
She sought a resting place upon a knoll
Shade-circled by an odorous spreading lime.
And then she watched the waves of woodland, like
A sombre covering on the near hill-side,
Flow from the heights and ripple heavily
Along the valley's flexure, and collect
In closest folding where the spirit voice
Still murmured of the brooklet's hiding place;
And from amongst the prodigal low laughs
She culled an eloquent whisper,--undertones
Of Nature's minor mixing with the glee
Of spendthrift carelessness, and binding all
To a meet song for human hearts that keep
Their passionate silence of unfathomed thought.
But while amidst her brain the whisper turned
To form of rhythmic words, and seemed to slide
Away again in song, there came a shout
Of children breaking the bee-haunted quiet
About the golden lime.

Three little ones
Rushed with quick ardours of their childish feet
To claim the great dry pasture, and seek out
The mignon treasures Nature loves to hide
About the hedge-rows and her every nook
For tiny hands like these. At happy play
She idly watched them running to and fro,
And marked their yellow hair and great brown eyes,
Whence innocence and wonder looked in turn
Between the fearless smiles. She saw the flush
Of wholesome colour on the roundest cheeks
That ever tempted down an emulous kiss;
And following still their actions with her eyes,
Sighed at the joy with which they pulled the flower,
And sought out trembling grass, and shook the seeds
With shrills of laughter from poor Dandelion,
Then warned the noxious nettle to keep safe
Those spiteful hidden weapons from their touch,
And timidly put out their dimpled hands
To feel the thistle's white and furry head,
Still mindful of the bristling guard below.
And then they turned to more ambitious play;
The eldest drew a wooden rapier out,
And on the air there rose up martial sounds
Of drum and trumpet from the baby throats.
And suddenly a smile crept unawares
Across the maiden's features as she watched
The child with his toy sword, who, in himself,
Saw a whole marching regiment of men.

Perchance this smiling drew them, for at once
The would-be soldiers made an end of war,

And with grave faces stood to contemplate
The stranger who could sit so still and mute
Beneath the good tree's shade. The youngest child
With little toddling steps approached more near,
And leaned its dimpled arms, brown with the sun,
On Milicent's knee, and looked on her with eyes
All innocent of shame and consciousness.
Then Milicent smiled again, and the slow smile
Went widening downwards to her prisoned heart,
And seemed to loose a locked up agony.
And then the baby put its finger out
And with the new child-touch (the sacred thing
Of earth and heaven, the complement of joy,
Of hope the affirmation), laid it soft
Upon her cheek; and lo! a sudden tear
Rolled from the eyes that fain had smiled again,
Only the child's hand seemed too sweet a thing
For smiles to catch at;—and the human heart
Gives what its hidden treasury may hold
When any touch avails to stir its depths—
And so from Milicent's there came a tear.
But then the baby, with a winsome look,
Lisped, "Are you naughty?" from the crimson lips
That seemed too new for speech. And Milicent,
Strangely relieved, and feeling the pent cry
Surge out in words for these safe listeners,
Bent down to kiss the yellow hair, and said:
"Not naughty, little sweet one, only sad
Because one, who I thought was very good,
Has not been good to me."

The innocence

Of children is a sign; their artless words
At times leap out of life like oracles
Spoken from hidden powers. The eldest boy
Had watched in silence his wee sister's play,
But now he lifted up his heaven-filled eyes
From under thoughtful brows, and gently said
With grave assuring looks: "You should not cry,
He will grow good again;" and with his words
He laid upon her knee a puny flower
Crushed from too ardent pressure of his hand.
But the sweet two-year baby clamoured out
A cry of "tired, so tired," and Milicent,
In strange delight, uplifted the wee thing,
And folded it within her tender arms
To childhood's happy sleep, the while the boys
Played round her knees some medley of their own.
It was not long before the mother came
With voluble quick thanks, and rifled all
The moment of its treasure.

And the world
Rushed back again on Milicent; but she
Had caught a seed of comfort to upsend
A little shoot for every daily need,
And teach her patient helpfulness and peace.
Home in her hand she bore the broken flower
And pressed its puny form upon a sheet
Of snowy paper, writing underneath
The boy's sweet words: "He will grow good again."

* * * * *

Years of existence pass in halcyon times
Or deaden in a dull monotony:

Then sudden inroads of tumultuous days
Sweep off our souls to action midst the stress
Of overwhelming incident and change;
We seem caught up in eddies of events
That reach us from the wide and general stir,
And plunge us with them into dangerous shoals,
Where alien life fights midst its rocky fate.

Some three months back, an hour had broke the trance
Of dreams for Milicent, and left a pause
Wherein she only gathered breath, and knew
Some dreaded action surely followed on.
One early morn, before the breakfast hour,
She entered, quiet as light on winter days,
To cheer the room or e'er her father came,
And found a missive lying near her plate,
Writ in a masculine hand, to her unknown.

She read, and felt the cruel colour come
And cut her heart, and smite into her cheek.
Thus ran the letter:

"Let me see at once,
If this be possible, the maiden whom
My son so trusts; and let me learn of her,
From out her very eyes, if thus indeed
The trust be well reposed." The signature
Was this—"From Ulric Dorme."

Then Milicent
Turned to the window, where the pushing rose
Still flung its latest blossoms, and hung out
White summer badges through the autumn days.

So dear had grown monotony and peace,
Her heart shrank back from facing the rough world
Strewn o'er with ashes of a fiery pain,
And, faint for effort, seemed to blanch afraid
Before a voice that came to call her out
Anew to some wild tumult. And her eyes
Wandered with longing look to the far skies,
Searching for quick escape. Like one of old,
She wished the wings of morning would enfold
Her faltering spirit, bear it hence away
To some new clime, where thrilling airs might blow
Resilient life about her.

But her love,
Wounded and crippled, yet enduring still,
Spake from her panting breast and made its claim.
For love's relief comes in the putting out
A hand of help to others; there refills
A cup of joy for the poor parchèd mouth
Where any aid be asked by the beloved.
Love lives in giving; and his wing is maimed
But in rejection of his precious gifts.
Hath he not clothed himself in sacrifice—
Perchance at first unwittingly, but last
To wear the purple as a regal robe,
Conscious what raiment best befits a king?

There is a prayer which day by day we said
When a new world shook o'er our infant eyes
Its fruitful wonders, when we had no need
This mystery of petition should slip through
Our lips' incompetency, for the mind

Guessed at no tragic chances in the flow
Of all the equal hours, but on its work
Of simple learning or glad play was bent.
"Forgive us all our trespasses," it ran,
"As we forgive the trespasses of those
Who sin against us." And the measured prayer
Reproves us in its answer day by day,
Who now have writ the scroll of our misdeeds
Too full for easy cancelling, yet take
A hoarding count of every biting wrong
Mankind hath dealt out to us in his turn.

Where is the generous love that can brush out,
With one wide sweep of wing, records of sin,
Obliterate the memory of wrong,
And smile upon an ineffectual harm?
If we receive a hurt and take it in,
And let it rankle there and grow corrupt,
Parcel and part of it we must become,
And spread a rank infection from ourselves
Anew to others; but let us receive
A wrong to conquer it, turn it to use,
Till like the plough it break up fallow land
To let the good seed through; and we shall grow
As the rich fields where dewy grasses sleep,
And lights of flowers give leave to passing men
To learn refreshing peace, and drop awhile
Their burden, and make pause on calming thought.
By all in life most just and temperate,
O brother soul, we're charged—not niggardly,
But in unsparing measure—to forgive,
Who stand in presence of great mysteries,

And have but knowledge of our ignorance
For wisdom in this world.

But Milicent,
Not on this wise thought out the moment's stress;
She was so mere a woman that her love,
Stricken with wounds, rose like a pallid ghost
Out of its new-made grave, in eagerness
To serve the man who called it first to life.
She simply felt that now a claim had come
From Clement on that love, and faithfully
Her all of honour answered to the trust.

So she set down a firm resolving hand
Upon the natural cry of aching pain;
And when her father entered for his meal,
Her eyes were softer than their softest wont,
And filled anew with peace. She tendered him
Her cheering service with unshaking hand,
And watched him where he sat, a silent form,
And dumbly ate his food.

Life had gone out
So long for him, he only heard the world
As one may hear a distant tumult creep,
Like a bee's humming to a dreamy ear.
He asked but leave to sit alone at ease
Amongst heap'd volumes, and pass through and through
The leaves like some slow worm, and spin from them
A web of thought about him to wrap close
And keep the world out, and himself within
Safe from life sounds.

This morning, ere he sought
His haunt of books, his daughter softly rose
And stood before him, and held out her hand
To touch his scanty hair. He lifted up
Dull pondering eyes that turned a mouldy thought
For ever in their depths, and seemed amazed
At any light that scintillated from
The world-life to them. When she was assured
That she had caught his ear, she gently knelt
And pressed her wealth of hair against his arm,
And laid her slender fingers on his hand,
And said: "My father, grant me this request!
You've old Christina will attend to you;
She'll come in gently; and at even time
You will not miss me much, but read the books
You do not want me for: and sometimes then
You'll let me go this autumn for a day,—
Or ev'n for many days—to see a friend
Who also needs my help?"

He turned and looked
Upon the downcast eyes, and slowly saw
How white and thin the small cool fingers were
That lay like snow upon his wrinkled palm.
And something in her aspect minded him
Of a dead face from out the long ago
That came confusedly like a reproach,
But passed before he grasped it. Then he said:
"Ah! go, my daughter. You'll not leave me long?
There's something in that theory incomplete,—
It calls for steady thought; I need your help.
But go, my daughter, for young things have need

Of change, being volatile and wanting in
A grave stability."

She smiled her thanks,
Like a poor drooping lily that has caught
A puny ray from a low obscure sun.
And when the morning labours were complete,
She set out with a calm heart of resolve.

V.

Compelling all my thoughts to juster ways,
Thy spirit has a force to master me,
Nor can this change though darkness and long days
Have stol'n the looks which once I had from thee.
Thou art become my conscience, for a law—
A sacred impulse—can my will control
To act and think as though thy far eyes saw
Through all the dim recesses of my soul.
Some desecration tremblingly I fear
To that which thy sweet faith hath pictured me,
Some variance from that form which thou dost rear
In the white chambers of thy phantasy.
What art thou not to me, when I can find
An ideal image only in thy mind!

WITHIN a park where some uncultured lands
Kept the sweet breath of gorse and heath alive,
Lay, like a nucleus, large and lonely fields,
And communing woods; and in the midst of them,
Enclosures of a wondrous garden, where
Spread the great front and wings of Old Dorme Hall.

The winding way that led through all this wealth,
Began amid a place of wilder charms,
Where waters, leaping from a slant of rock,
Made turmoil in the silence underneath;
And there the trees forever leaned their heads
For closer whispers o'er the dancing yeast,
And only let the light creep trembling through
Their high-flung branches in such tiny streams
They shook upon the spray like single gems.
'Twas here the great park gates were hung; and nigh
Stood the lodge cottage; then on either side
Nature's own hand had thrown a barrier
Of rock, and steep incline, and high-poised tree;
And these again went flowing east and west
To moorlike wastes, and heathery haunts of game,
Enclosed by broken barricades of wall.

The wanderer in such lands is safely shut

From the intruding iterated tread
Of following steps upon his heels; and far
The dull persistency of noisy tones
Is banished to the troubled distances.
For here great Nature, in a hermit mood,
Puts off her richer garb, and, clothed in gloom,
Affirms by those uplifted solemn peaks
Her right to loneliness against the skies.
And underneath the bared and rocky tips,
Gather the heather and the scanty turf
To keep intruding hands of busy thrift
Contented in the milder plains below.
But ah! what welcome give they to the feet
That freely roam amidst their liberty;
For they will teach how Nature's silence is
More eloquent than eloquence of speech;
And how the wholesome breath of gorse and heath
Can bring revival, subtilize the sense,
Until the whispers of reality
Surprise the fever-haunted brain, and reach
Their affirmation of a wider life
To the uneasy mind, that whirls and whirls
Within a circuit of its narrowness.

But Milicent's path lay on the bordering grass
That touched the long drive line; she passed the moors
Far on her left, and only felt the peace
Come, like a kindly touch, to bear away
The turmoil of too many thronging thoughts
That ached with memories of Clement Dorme.
How often had she heard his voice describe
The wide and lonely parklands which at last

Her saddened eyes might see; the flowing stream
Had made a centre to his oft-told tales
Of merry-timed adventure in his youth.
And now the crisping of the lazy wave
Kept murm'ring her love's name within her ear,
Who never more could send full-hearted smiles
With gentle welcome to his memory.

How sad when every tree and hill and cloud,
And all the changes of the glowing day,
And, more than these, the night's immensities,
Are writ all over with a single name
For some one eye; and yet the inward heart
Is like a ruined nest from which escapes
The hollow moaning of an empty wind
Blown through the broken sides.

At length she reached
The grey and ancient pile, and found herself
Waiting in a dim room, to which time gave
An impress of far-reaching memories.

Not long her waiting lasted, for there came
A step along the corridor and hall.
Quicker and firmer seemed the old man's tread
Than matched the feebleness of gathering years,
And she looked up with quick dilating eyes
To meet his entering form. Her rapid glance
Beheld him standing there—a tall strong frame
With snowy beard that fell upon the chest;
And then her lids drooped in a kind of fear.
But he, with courteous air, advanced and took

Her hand, and said: "I thank you that you give
A prompt relief to my anxiety.
I pray you lay aside this sheltering hat.
Forgive me if I ask you to draw near
Where the broad day sends rays unmodified
By artificial screens. This room is dim;
But with that shining help I yet can see
More closely my son's friend."

And where the beams
Fell strongly through a curious window frame—
Dark with old oak and rich with carved device—
She stood, and felt the lights of afternoon
Strike on her face for Ulric Dorme to read
Therein her faithfulness or treachery.
The blushes of her heart had died that night
When Clement told his story, or at once
Her secret had sent thence its crimson signs
To beat in every vein of her wan cheeks,
And dye them in fierce shame. But still and white
Like any statue stood she, with her eyes
Heavily downcast, while old Ulric Dorme
Waited in silence. He had laid one hand
Upon her shoulder—not discourteously—
The other held her fingers, and his look
Went searching steadily her countenance.

But when the silence grew to too much pain,
She lifted one quick glance to learn the face
That seemed to burn above her with its eyes.
No! No! Not Clement's! Not his lineaments!
Here was no copy of him! And the dread

Gave place to comfort and relief, until
She, with unfearing look—yet maidenly—
Scanned Ulric Dorme, and sought to find the prints
Of life-long sorrow in the lion brows.
And then the innocence of sympathy
Melted the strangeness from her, and she threw
Lights of unmeasured pity from her eyes
Upon the man whose secret tale she kept.

How long this silent intercourse might last
She knew not; but at length he loosed her hand
And with a sudden trembling in his voice,
Murmured: "Forgive me that I treat you thus
Unmannerly! But has not my one son
Risked all the hope that keeps a flaming hell
From rushing on me, to a woman's trust?"

He waved her to a seat, and threw himself
With thoughtful brow upon a distant couch,
And muttered on: "What danger can excuse
The rashness which thus casts upon the wind
A written leaf whereon our secret glares.
To leave our reticent and cautious ways,
And blurt out to some chance-met maiden ear
The hoarded mystery of these long years!
A woman's heart to trust to! What is that?
Ah! What's a woman's heart? So strangely out
Of every divination are they planned.
If we with worship meetly hedge them round,
And close them in—these women—with our love,
With a majestic look they draw aside,
And stand like queens; and if we hope to clasp

The regal form safe prisoned by our walls,
They softly smile, and like great angels rise,
And float away to that mysterious heaven
That sent them here to mock us."

He leaned down
His head, and slowly heaved a deep-drawn sigh;
But when the sigh was spent he murmured on.

"But if like dogs we treat them, take their love,
Their ardour, and their generous sacrifice,
And fling it back upon them, they creep near
And grovel to us! And they have such eyes
To haunt and haunt us all the weary nights,
When wine and play and noise ring through the brain,
And keep us waking! And yet—soft, my man!
Think not your slave's your own! Oh! strange free souls
That open suddenly and are the light
Whereby we learn our own disgrace, and then
Who leave us—with again the regal look
The angels must have lent them from their heaven.
Look! where she sits—the slender English maid,
Not grand like our Italians, with the forms
That keep traditions of the Roman age
Living within the mind. No, not like that;
But with compelling lights within her eyes,
And shadowed fate upon her tragic brows,
And mysteries of purpose scarcely masked
By fragile gentleness. And she it is
Who comes like retribution and holds fast
My hopes and peace for life—perchance to wreck
The all for which I have a care to live,

Who else had ended long since this dull round
Of futile misery that men call—"Life."
Why should he risk it? Were there not safe ways
Within our comprehension—schemes for brains
Of masculine strength—without this trustful fling,
This gambler's throw, upon an unknown chance?
Who knows? Maybe the lad hath trusted right.
There's something in this Universe at odds
With our best schemes. A cancelling finger goes
About our calculations to confuse
Our ratios and proportions, and set down
The product out of reckoning at last.
Perchance, 'tis elsewhere that our safety lies;
And if 'tis so why take not this blind leap,
And follow where my son has led? I saw
A matchless soul within her maiden eyes,
And I—how can I choose but risk it too?"

There are strange movements pass along our life,
And seem the waftings of a spirit wind
Constraining us into an untried way,
Who have trod firmly in our chosen paths.
These reach us sometimes, in a new surprise,
A revelation from a maiden's looks
That beckon to an undiscovered world.
But from the landmarks of our former life
We gain no guidance, see no pointing hand;
And we are left to find the unbeaten road
Alone, in darkness; while a sudden veil
Of strange self-diffidence obscures the eyes
That once with glad assured look could scan
From right to left about the pleasant path.

But now there is a change; upon that way,
Where every step may mean an overthrow,
Alone, untaught, we struggle on, and scale
The Alpine heights of feeling we call Love.

Yet more; though love should climb the mount of Love;
Though we may find once more the level road;
Through darkness comes again that searching wing
To bear us from the equal day and known,
And set us down upon a wildered place;
There our glib knowledge like a helpless corpse
Falls in a withering death about our feet,
And leaves us, all unclothed of fleshly aid,
To speak—a naked soul—with the vast voice
Whose words are whispers, yet whose every breath
Hurls us upon abysmal mysteries.
What promise of what help have we who move
Secure in our small circles, until caught
In the swift skirts of the great spirit life?
None other, than that we should cast ourselves
With full surrender on that vaster claim,
Follow that unseen force with noble trust,
Nor urge or ignorance, or narrow skill,
Or even our right for closer questioning,—
Who are the children of great mystery,
And stand in worlds whereof the meaning creeps
In fragmentary words, and doth not lend
A perfect sentence to our listening ear.

And Ulric pondered on the baffling chance
That shook him out of all his cautious ways,
Untied the silences of the dead years,

And gave their voices leave to speak again.
He seemed set helplessly upon a plain,
Conscious of ready foes, and for a guard—
No longer stern defiance of his fate,
Ready resources of his manly brain,
The armour of his strong intelligence,—
But strange surrounding shows of love and truth
That bade him put a hand of child-like trust
Upon the saving help of faithfulness,
And passive patience—mystic-seeming things
Which feel like weakness, yet are the world strength.

And while he pondered, Milicent at rest
Upon the pause, could gather back her calm
(Disturbed by his strange bearing) while she sought
The reason of his evident disquiet.
He broke her musing by his sudden words:
"I pray you tell me, how long years have passed
Since you with Clement made this friendly bond?"

"Four years since then," she answered, "have the buds
Opened pink blooms upon the apple-tree,
And now 'tis autumn, and the fruits are ripe."

"And with your woman's wit you could conceal
The piquancy of this rare tale the while?"

"Not so," she answered, "'tis a mournful truth
That opened very lately on my mind."

Quickly he rose, and with a dark-sent flush

On his old cheek, and with a kindling eye,
Approached again to scan her narrowly.

"But you at least had knowledge these four years
That he, you call your friend, had other haunts
And found how sweet a Viola might bloom
For him one day to gather as his own?"

Two spots of red flamed in her either cheek;
Her heart smote heavily against her side
Preventing speech.

Then a deep-thoughted quiet
Returned, and with uplifted steadfast eyes,
Wherein he saw but calmness—though a spark
Of maidenly defiance softly sheathed
Menaced him from their depths—she firmly spoke:
"I judge that you have sent for me in trust
That I might give you help, who am but small
In help for any man; yet what I have
Most gladly will I give—for Clement's sake,
My friend; and for your own, because the heats
Of life have struck you strongly. As for that
You ask me—Clement's love—'tis folded up
'Twixt Viola and him. Our friendship too
Is a small sacred bond 'twixt him and me,
Nor toucheth other." And her voice broke off
Steadfastly quiet, as it had begun.

And Ulric turned away, and paced the room,
And reached a window on the further side,
Standing to watch, unwittingly, the spread

Of slowly widening rings on the great pool,
Where moved a shining flock of water-fowl
That idly turned and floated here and there,
Like little fleets that follow aimless ways
About a puny ocean. Then he came
With softer modulations in his voice,
Saying, "I, too, will trust you, Milicent,
Though I have need to learn the way to trust?"

For answer, she but gave a fleeting look
So soft and child-like, yet so well assured,
It threw a subtle chain o'er Ulric's mood,
And bound him to his words:—as though one should
In a heart-weary moment, when the world
Has clashed too sonorously on the ear
Its monster symphony of varied life,
Lean o'er a Pansy bed, and seek the blooms
And quietness that nestle side by side,
And whisper: "Oh! sweet Heartsease! let me in
To hide away in peace!" And from the cool
Embowering leaves a Pansy should look up
With its small face, and in a flower-like voice
Answer: "Ay! come and rest."

Then Ulric Dorme
Led Milicent through many other rooms
Towards a door whereat he paused awhile,
And turning, looked upon her as in thought,
Then entered without speech, she following close.

She saw a small oak-panelled chamber, where
Seclusion and strict privacy might reign.

And there were many books, and many signs
Of studious occupancy; and there stood
An open bureau near the window-seat,
Where cushions crimson-hued resolved their tints
To shades of darkness equal with the oak.
And then against the wall there stood a strange
And richly carved old cabinet that seemed
To keep a silence o'er some mystery.
And on the other side of the dim room
She saw a long high window, opening out
To steps that led upon a walk below,
Whose line ran quickly to a shrubbery,
And lost itself in darkness of the trees;
These pressed too near to let a western sun
Look boldly through the panes. The window, closed,
Was, as she judged, kept locked; for some loose sprays
Of green and crimson creepers had transgressed,
And crept across, and found a meeting-place.

In a near corner, where the light was dim,
Rose o'er the fire a manifold device
Of dark wood carving that went mounting up
To reach the ceiling; and, at length, her eye
Saw with a quick dilation how a face,
Most exquisite in gracious womanhood,
Looked from the duskiness of all that frame
With almost living lights within its eyes.
How beautiful beyond all speech! For now
The evening sun came with a lovely ray,
And touched it into likeness of true life,
And sent reflections of the moving leaves
To set a trembling coronal above

The broad and lucid brow, and deepen so
The shadows of the small pathetic mouth
Whose lips were parted—as though Love still breathed
A never-ending whisper of his pain.
But the great eyes held an appealing soul
That cried for judgment from their solemn depths,
And smote above the passion of the mouth
More passionate denial. Life-deep pain
Broke up the circles of their tenderness,
And carried looks beyond all earthly things
To speak alone with God.

And in a trance,
Milicent saw that it was Clement's face
Illumined with the wonder of a soul.
And lo ! within the soul she saw the pain
As it were her pain ; and the victory,
That showed to untaught sight like early death
Whose sure approach was presaged in the eyes,
Struck on her heart, prophetic of an end
That sought her also, through the anguished way
Of mortal struggle with an earthly love.

And all the sympathy of womanhood
With any living phase of womanhood,
Shook her with might that could not be controlled,
And rent her frame with sobs. Her soul was drenched
In deep emotion, and her hidden love
Wept with the tears that love alone can weep
In sympathy with all that tale of love,
And all that struggle of a noble soul,
Openly speaking from the canvas there.

But Ulric had kept still. He scarcely seemed
To wonder at her weeping; and he gazed
With her upon the picture till her sobs
Abated in their force, and then he said:
"Thus is it at the even tide. All day
She is a shadowy picture in a frame—
A speaking memory. But at this time
She lives again; and lo! the floating leaves
Sail down the heaven-sent rays from the great sun,
And crown her head with mystic coronals.
And then I know she walks in a far world,
Set in a place too high for me to reach,
Yea, face to face with Light and Holiness.
And there the secret and omnipotent Eyes
Read in her unveiled heart as in a book;
And 'midst the clusters of angelic thoughts
That float like winged flowers to take their place
About His feet who hides in mystery,
He finds a little memory of earth—
A memory, which in her gentleness
And tenderness (these softly clothed her round
In lovely garments, though her nobleness
Had never need for any covering)
She fain would stifle and forever hide.
And lo! that single memory of earth
Is my condemning judge; and it hath thrust
Me through this ache of years I have called 'Life;'
And last it thrusts me to oblivion."

He spoke in tones that gathered dreadfulness
From their deep quiet. But Milicent, as still,
Out of her heart-experience lifted words

To make reply with calmer emphasis,
And said: "Not so. There cannot be such thought.
She has forgiven. Her thoughts are open prayers
That wander from the perfect lips of love
And call you to her."

But he answered slow:
"For mine own peace, I would that we might flee,
Like that Francesca and that Paolo,
Before the anger of a whirling wind,
So that we were together, and my ears
Might learn the thoughts that master all her heart.
And yet, not so. Oh! saint, keep thy far heaven,
And slay me with thine eyes! I am content."

He moved away, and stood with one hand laid
Upon the carved wood of the cabinet,
The other sought for something in his breast.
She followed at his beckon, and stood still,
Feeling his eyes again were searching her.

"Milicent! There's a thing upon this earth
More precious to you than your own sweet life.
And from that one experience, you may judge
How life-long thoughts of dearness come to cling
About one, like the flesh, the blood, *the soul.*
It were then murder to take up these thoughts
And dash them on the rocks of faithlessness.
Out of such thoughts of mine, necessity
Hath weaved a scheme whereby I may atone
In some small measure. I would leave her son
Free of this blemish on his birth; and her,

To wear the honoured name which in world eyes
She wears at present. Ah! poor empty name!
A ragged clothing for a soul like hers!
And yet the worth of it to our one child
Is much; and for myself, thus to atone
Is like an agony of great desire
Which in a non-fulfilment slayeth me.
And all my life this way atonement runs.
But now Death nears me; and I sometimes fear
His sudden arm will strike me ere I find
A due defence of all my interests.
Therefore I ask, if such untimely blow
Fall on me in the absence of my son,
I may give power to my attendant here
(A man much in my trust) that at the first
He send for you ere other hands be nigh;
And you, with your own fingers, shall untwist
This chain from off my neck, and take the key,
And at the time appointed shall unlock
This cabinet, and draw my good Will out,
And render it up to my family."

As gravely as he spoke, she answered him:
"Yea. I will do this thing if I have life."

And then he took the key out of his breast,
Unlocked the cabinet, and showed within
A folded parchment large and plainly writ.

But in the cabinet a packet lay;
And this he reached and placed within her hand.
"This is," he said, "a letter which my son

Writing to you committed to my care.
And when he sent it, speaking of his trust
In you, he told me how your innocent hands
Should reach between the sad suspended tones
Of two divided loves, and touching them
Allow some echo of their harmony
(Thus flowing through a medium heart) to reach
The either distant ear. And this is so?"

"Yes," said she, very still, "thus shall it be."
He turned, and bending o'er the cabinet
Hid some emotion, while he murmured low:
"Oh! sweet knight errant! Some keep golden spurs
In lustre with the stress of knightly deeds."

Then it was over. Ulric had prepared
That, after due refreshment, she be driven
Back to her home. But with soft pleading, she
Besought to be allowed to stray alone,
Even as she came, along the pleasant road
And scented moors.

Thus wandering away,
She found herself upon a heathery hill,
And where the merry ling rose, flung her limbs,
And laid her head amongst the purple bells.

Alone with Nature, she might lift a cry
Wrung from a sorely burdened heart; she wept
In ruth for others,—for the poor old man
Whose ruined grandeur sent great pitying thrills,
Mingled with awe and wonder, through her heart;

And for the lady, whose ineffable eyes
Still followed her; and for a strange self-ruth
To be so small and weak, yet so convulsed
With passionate shocks of life. And most she wept
Because 'twas Clement's face that she had seen
Within the picture; yet a deathless soul
From *him* transmitted no apparent light;
And much she feared some will-o'-wisp of love,
Some following of a brain-created dream,
Had landed her upon a marshy place
Through whose most trackless waste she saw no way,
Save just one little line that seemed to cut
A few safe steps before her, simply hewn
In inspirations of integrity
And flawless honour. Otherwise there seemed
No hope, nor any reason in her life;
And thoughts would come, how sweet if Nature spoke
And said: "Ah, Milicent, 'tis over now.
Creep in, poor child, between the gorse and ling,
And slumber safely—not to wake again.
Put off this aching consciousness of self;
I have the balms to cure a wound like yours;
My dreams shall lull you as you sink in sleep;
The flowers shall come about you as you lie,
You shall be one with them; and, being so still,
They'll spread a covering under the wide sky,
And at the night leave room for star-like rays
To wander down upon you. Come, my child,
Creep to my breast. Lie still. Be comforted."

Such flitting voices murmur through the brain,
Dreams of a far-off rest, when we can see

Existence but as pain. And yet life plays
Great harmonies from our unconscious hearts
As from an instrument. But we can feel
The thrills of music only as a touch
That falls upon a resonant quivering string.

Milicent waited till night came and closed
The speaking eyes of the attendant flowers;
Even the jocund ling ceased merrily
To ring its purple bells, and, slumbering, changed
To dusky haunts of silence. And she rose
And stumbled down the way, and found again
The level, and at length her father's house.

VI.

Two sorrows ring their changes in my mind
And weary with their dull persistency,
Like the slow moaning of an empty wind
Through a deserted hive, where once the bee
Murmured of flowery sweets and sunny meads,
And moonlight moments when the curled leaf brings
A fragrant home for his too truant wings,
And of the busy instinct which he heeds
While turning into form his scheme of honied deeds.

One that I failed thee—could not be that thing
Which thy foreseeing eye in me didst trace ;
Found not the way to lift a stronger wing
And pluck the one star of exceeding grace,
The single star of all the myriad fair,
Reserved for us—if one could climb as high
And, conquering, claim it from the lonely sky,
Taking the dream of beauty past compare,
To lay it at the other's feet, and leave it there.

And one that thou couldst fail me—couldst not be
That which my passionate pictures had designed ;
But all the trust and joy I had in thee
Couldst break and fling upon a scattering wind ;
And with thy careless treading couldst erase
The momentary colours that were made
By purest dewdrops tremblingly afraid
To feel the rich glows which sun-angels trace
Upon them lying dreamlike on the lily's face.

I charge thee, be to God that glorious thing
Thou couldst not be to me ; the seeing eye
Which could perceive the shadowy morning wing
Of Beauty o'er thee was a prophecy ;
And whilst thou art fulfilling it, I go
And journey on, a pilgrim soul, alone
Towards the strange and difficult unknown,
Seeking the thought which thou o'er me didst throw
What transient time we stood beneath the lost star-glow.

AUTUMN had flown, and with him all the tints
Of warmth and fruitfulness; the burdened trees
Long had resigned their loads, while fertile fields
Shorn of rich tresses starkly lay and cold,
Awaiting other covering: for the time
Of mirth and harvest and his jovial reign
Being over, he had whispered to the leaves
That straightway fluttered from the gold-clad branch
One after other, with the gentle sigh
Of ended life; and thus—his train o'erflecked
With scattered splendours—Autumn, the great king,
Fled as a mourning spirit from the earth
Before usurping Winter, and was gone.

The pale sun-empty days that die so soon
And creep for shelter into caves of night,
Passed like dull shadows full of equal gloom
O'er Milicent. But better are those days
Slow-footed pushing on through solitude,
Than flashing evenings full of tawdry life
All alien from the mind. And Milicent,
A guest at Northmoor Castle (where the Blounts
Upheld their stately home), could only know
An easeful change when, every light and sound
Alike extinguished by the hand of night,

She gathered courage in her silent room
To summon into view the down-thrust life,
And, questioning, grapple with it in the dark
And wrest some answer. But there only came,
"Endure; pursue thy path; not yet is given
The meaning to thy heart."

Then she would snatch
A troubled sleep, confused with happy dreams
Of how she wandered in a sunny land;
And one was with her whose obscurèd face
She never saw, but knew 'twas Clement Dorme's;
And there was mutual speech, tender reproach—
Old days come back again with added joy—
And in the midst of all a secret bliss
Because she knew that, could she see the face
Hidden behind the strange eclipsing shade,
A soul like the great lady's would look through
The illumined beauty. And there were fair blooms
Which they two gathered; and their words broke off
With too much meaning, yet no sense was lost;
And never came the glib and frequent speech
Of any Viola betwixt them twain
To mar the music.

But she shuddering waked,
Finding 'twas earth again, and chid herself
That thus the dream went wandering night by night
About her brain, who was vowed firm and fast
In perfect faithfulness; so lay wide-eyed,
And felt how the majestic silences
Of nightly hours give leave for searching thoughts

To claim the spirit. And she knew and knew
With dreadful clearness she had missed the way,
And stumbled in her life, and spilt the good
She should have hoarded, on the thankless earth;
And worse, that she had missed the way with him,
And led him—how she knew not—led him too
Into a marshy spot from whence his soul
Must bear ignoble stains for evermore.
She thought herself a foolish wildfire light
Who had allured his too too facile mind
To wander through a land of pleasant days,
And stumble in unknightly fall at last.
She should have been a crystal-shining star
High set in a far sky, softly withdrawn
In closely mantling clouds, serene, retired;
And then, whate'er befell, it had been hers
To leave untroubled memories for his soul
Who, like all others, groped along the road
And cried for light!

'Twas thus with mind abased
She struck her hands towards any shred of thought,
And from the ruined garden of her dreams
Plucked the remaining bloom of sombre hue—
Pensive self-blame—to lay it on a shrine
Of love enduring. Yet a stately Pride
Rose loftily above her broken joys,
And gave her back the wholeness of herself,
Until she looked with a strange pitying smile
Upon the ruin at her feet, and kept
A calm aloofness from her secret woe,
Disowning it. And still she ever knew

She must go unforgetting through the world;
And with a finger laid upon the lips—
As who kept silence o'er a sleeping grief,
Or who kept silence o'er a deep regret—
Remember and remember all her life
Both the lost hope and lost the sweeter joy,
And her mistaken gifts, and how 'tis sore
To lift a hard-earned Wisdom to the niche
Where smiled a rosy Hope.

So sadly life
Brings us, through bitter losing of our joys,
The wisdom by whose aid we might have won
And kept them all our own.

Then she would rise
And draw the dying embers of her fire
To a rekindling closeness, and push back
The heavy curtains from the window pane,
And see how white and wonderful and still
The innocent snow looked lying on the earth,
And how the trees stood as pale watchers there
Beneath the ardent stars. The crystal calm
Was an enchanted peace; for now the earth,
Enfranchised of the weight of fervid life—
The thrills of Spring, the Summer's burdened days,
And swelling energies of Autumn time—
Awoke beneath its snowy coverlet
To silence and to thought. And she who came
To touch the perfect heart of all this pause,
Discerned how near a thing the spirit world
Can be to one who shuts a secret door

Upon a sad experience. Loneliness
Is a great teacher; they who stand alone
Can send their prayers along the sleepless hours,
Nor stay to ask if prayer availeth aught
Where other help is none.

A line of light
Shone from her window on the pearlèd snow
With faint uncertain ray; and she would dream
That thus a little hope should grace her path,
Downshining from above. And she prayed low:
"Ah! let him not be one of those sad souls
The poet pictured, who pursued nor good
Nor evil, but who took the middle way
And sought their own content, so were at last
Passed by of Mercy and of Justice too.
Ah! not like shrivelled unregarded leaves
Let his life perish; but uplift the soul
Planned nobly, to a better end than this."
Such orison had brought the shining feet
Of Peace about her; but a sudden touch
Arrested that sweet presence ere it came.
A visionary Viola would pass
With looks of foolish satisfied content,
Marring the happier pictures of her brain.
This was the bitter thought, this Viola!
She had not wakened to the clarion call
Of Love upon her; but all narrowed up
Within her own small circle, heeded not
That elsewhere flights of angels with their songs
Swept over broader skies. O deaf and blind!
And wedded to her, must not his ear close

To Life's consummate strain? And she should see
The dull prosaic and the commonplace
Shut sluggishly upon him, like the blight
That slowly blears the landscape near a town
Into flat dreariness!

And yet not so!
Faith rose as in denial, and by her side
Milder Humility. To Viola
Had come by way of life the entrusted gift,
And she in her impatience sorely erred;
She would be still.

Life, to a soul like hers,
Could never seem a great o'erwhelming flood
Wherein fortuitous atoms tossed and whirled
Or scrambled for best places. If the stream
Ran darkly, yet with no unmeaning noise,
Nor undirected, could it flow for one
Who viewed it from an altitude of calm,
And raised an unstained standard very high,
And handled every virtue with the grip
Of living heroism. Her love itself
Touched with a foot of fire each perfect peak
Of mountain thought, and leapt from height to height
Like flames of evening sun throughout a range
Of carved snow summits.

Thus the sacredness
Of energy within her, left no room
For a long-harbouring question in her mind,
Whether the stress laid on her were effect

Of crushing forces driven indifferently
Upon her conscious soul—or whether this
Were the predicted and the chosen part
Reserved for her by Hands that taught the whole
To slow unfold, from out the primal times,
The one sublime intent. She, hope inspired,
Looked on her life in reverence, as one piece
Entrusted to her from the great design.

And reverencing herself, she could not stay
Her heart from honour of her fellow man.
And beyond others, Viola, who stepped
Near to her consecrated bound of life,
Commanded reverence; yea! and much meek help,
Being God-appointed to a sacred trust
And to deep hope-filled years. Thus, day by day,
O'erscanning Dorme's behest with liberal mind,
She set herself to be his Viola's friend
And not alone the servant of their loves,
Waiting submissively to see what flower
Should blossom out of these realities—
These ordered facts, that came and shattered all
Her dream's fair arrogancy. It was plain
That Viola was called and she was left;
And God knew best.

Thus strove her faithful mind
To find the narrow and the living way
Across an arid desert of events.
Her thoughts were like a slow progressing cloud
That screened her from the heats of noonday sun,
O'ercanopying her head. Her thoughts again

Were like a silent and persistent stream
That, howsoever small, flowed by her path
And called some meagre yet refreshing blooms
To live about her feet.

Ah ! grace of life !
Thou never wilt forsake courageous souls !
Thou hast a promise and a secret gift
For those who follow with intrepid heart
Thy authoritative lead, nor basely try
To claim the guidance of the way themselves
Vainly fainthearted.

But long watching nights
To spiritual paleness touched her cheek,
And lent a dreamy brightness to her eyes,
Until Sir Basil Blount paused in his tales
About the ancient grandeur of his house ;
And, groping midst his memory's hidden stores
For some poetic fervour of his youth
(Now safely dried to ceremonious forms),
Bent towards her saying : " You've sadly changed the rose,
Your rightful colour, for transparent hues
Of moonlight pallor which the lily wears.
And what enchanted spell awakes your eyes
To lights like those that haunt the lily's heart
Dew-drenched beneath the stars ? So ! so ! Reform !
Or else we name you Queen of Lilies White."

And Milicent blushed scarlet ; and her thought
Wrought on the fancy till she took the whim

To seek some fabric hued like the dusk nooks
Of shadowy greens that slumber in a wood,
And shape it as a shield, and trace thereon
The lily's petals and the lily's face
Woven in strange device; and this should be
The armour of her honour. Day by day
Beneath her fingers grew the flower-like forms
In silken threads. She sat by Viola
Through many tedious hours of fluent talk,
And kept her thoughts at peace on the sweet work,
Like winged things that poise above a bed
Of real lilies and drink up the scents
With murmurous content. Viola meanwhile
Stitched audibly, and let her sentiments
Fall in continuous words that beat the ear
As rain strikes on a pane.

One morning thus
They sat at work, and near the sociable fire
Forgot the leaden skies and falling snows;
Until occasion and the tempting warmth
Melted the heart to closer intercourse.
With softly shaken head and idle hand
Ceasing its labour, and with chastened air
Thus Viola began:

"'Tis many months
Since I to Clement gave my promised troth;
And half that time since I have found in you,
My dreamy Milicent, a gentle friend.
So run my days! How like a book is Life!
One page is shut and then another turned!

And when I bound myself in faith to him
I closed for ever down a leaf of mine!
One scarcely can believe it! How time flies!
And what strange changes come! Two years ago,
Just where you sit, stood one I thought might be——
Well! Girls have fancies! And one thinks and thinks
In winter when there's nothing else to do!
And he had been so much about the house."

"Ah yes!" said Milicent, while her needle pierced
Right through a lily's heart. "You two have leaned
So long the same way that you meet at last,
And all is well."

"Why how you thrum that theme,"
Took Viola the word in discontent,
"I meant not Clement, no, nor named his name.
We're safe engaged—that's sure—unless he turn,
Or I! And who's to turn against Dorme Hall
And all that splendid wealth? I must have wealth!
And Clement must have me. And—yes, of course
I love him; that's all said. Why, child! How strange,
How white you are! You have the oddest eyes;
They fairly shake me with their steadfast look
And make me ask myself, what wrong in me
It is you're gazing at?"

She lowered her lids,
And said: "I ask your pardon. But you spoke
In mysteries. I have not understood."

"'Twas nothing but a little backward glance

My memory gave upon some pleasant days
Now closed away. You know not Lawrence Dale?
He, as my father's ward, put out a claim
Upon my friendship from our early years."
She paused and let her soft unanchored thoughts
Float down a frittering stream of sentiment
In luxury of languid trustfulness:
"Yes! there are days and weeks within my life
Kept sacred for him, by the memories
Of gently blossoming hopes that died too soon,
And sweet beginnings of a futile dream
Now laid to rest with them,—as one may lay
Old treasures in a seldom opened chest
Midst scents of roses and of marjoram,
Through which the sunshine flowed in happier times
And seems to linger yet."

"But when Love comes,"
Cried Milicent, "we let the living breath
Blow off our dilettante sentiments,
And with them over-scented sickly things
(Decaying roses, marjoram and all)
To keep the air pure for the coming king
Who shall have sole possession."

"Nay, we keep,"
Said Viola, "some corners for ourselves!
A sweet pot-pourri of our former lives
Adds flavour to the present. Why forget
That flowers have blossomed in an earlier spring
Affluent of sunshine too?"

"Well, if you run
The metaphor so close, then, Viola,
I say we take the blossoms of our lives,
Our unblown fancies, all that once seemed sweet,
To lay them at the feet of our true love,
That he may crush the petals with his tread.
So, dying, they may yield to *him* alone
Their latest fragrance. Oh! we meetly weave
A carpet of our fancies which we use
To deck that pavement where we stand and wait
The approach of the prime passion! If at all
We think of them again, it is to point
Our finger downwards, crying: 'Look, O Love,
How thus my former days have shaped themselves
Into a fitting ground to bear the step
That henceforth hallows it.'"

"Sweet Milicent,
If all were as you say, the world were lost
In transports of emotion. Take my word!
We're commonplace at heart; our lives are ruled
By dull considerations of what suits
The opportune and proper. But I'm young,
And in the rear of you in sobering years;
I cannot yet, at once, close up that page
Of brief illusion. No! my lingering eyes
Peruse the generous sentiments of youth,
The fond faint thoughts—ideals—now tenderly
Softened by sweet regrets."

"As I've a heart
That beats with woman's constancy and truth

I do protest, I cannot comprehend
Your meaning, Viola!"

"You're too precise
To search for meanings where one gently deals
In vaguest aspirations, sympathies
That peep out from a cloudy spirit-world,
In sad heart-sorrows——"

"There you reach a word
I understand. 'Heart-sorrow!' What is this?"

She laid aside her work and, kneeling down
By Viola, uplifted dominant eyes
Of earnest search, and firmly grasped her hands,
And said: "I think, you've promised Clement Dorme
That, when in summer he return again,
You will become his wife. And you have given
Your love as well as troth?"

"Sweet questioner!
Most grave-eyed Milicent! You follow not
The delicate shades of meaning in a heart
Perchance too sensitive."

But Milicent,
With solemn look, compelled more earnest words;
And in a kind of haste she added: "Yes!
Loose my two hands! Yes, Milicent, as I live
I love him truly! But you scare away
My cherished fancies. I but turned a thought
Of old delight to make a little glow

This snow-pale morning, when one has a need
Of coloured interest. But you pin me so
To one idea, and narrow all my mind
To an article of faith."

"There are some thoughts
Too highly-flavoured for a wholesome soul,
And some too *weak* for health," said Milicent,
Rising and stepping back. "Again, there are
Life-strong ideas which like hill-splendours rise
And lift so high their summits, we may climb
Through Time, ere we shall conquer and possess
Their silent beauty! Wherefore, Viola,
Have you to-day brought in a stranger name
Before unmentioned to me?"

"That is plain.
He comes to-night to visit at our house."

"Well then—I'm sorry for't."

"But you at least,"
Said Viola coldly, "will permit me still
To judge of right and wrong as touching acts
Where Lawrence is concerned! Your fervours strange
Oppress me. But I always must presume
You're not set here to act as Clement's spy?"

The venom of the words stung Milicent,
And "God forbid!" she cried with emphasis.
"You two are circled in a sacred love
Within whose bounds there comes no alien tread.

You wrong Love, Viola, and wrong him too,
And wrong yourself. Who dreams of watchful spies
Where all the land is lying in deep peace
Locked safe from foes? But come; we talk too long.
The room gets stifling. Look, dear Viola,
How tenderly and purely falls the snow,
Leaf after leaf down-floating through the skies
As single and persistent as the thoughts
That keep the mind, awaiting Love's sweet spring—
The presence of the loved one—covered close
In whitest robes of faith and tenderness.
What say you? Shall we climb Windgather Heights?
I see the sky is breaking from the west
Into a wintry smile. And from the rocks
We see the skirts of those wild woods that lie
In the near county, and dark fringe the edge
Of all that wealth of land they call Dorme Park."

She ended smiling, with that wistful look
Which calls response from others. So they two
Braved the clear nipping air, and saw the glooms
And lurid splendours of the winter hour
Topping in silence a majestic peak
Of solitary grandeur.

But at night
A stranger face gleamed at the evening board,
And cast a languid glance towards Viola,
Who sat with conscious dignity and flush
Of nervous pride. And an uneasiness
Took such a tyrant hold on Milicent
That all the present faded with its noise

Into a stagey dream; the while she seemed
To feel an intimate presence with far things,
And almost knew how anxiously the thoughts
Coursed through the distant mind of Clement Dorme,
As bats fly through the night and darkly swoop
In ominous silence, with no happy song
To break monotony with thrills of hope
Into imagined joy.

'Twas New Year's Eve.
And Lawrence Dale remained a whole week's length,
Filling the house with merry soldier talk,
Gay songs, and reckless mirth of careless life,
Although he met with no too favouring eye
From grave Sir Basil Blount. But Milicent
Learnt how this former ward, in youth's hot way
Of drinking up Life's cup in one rash draught,
Had squandered his slight fortune, and now stood
A needy soldier in a world of cares
Which touched him still too lightly; and she heard
That Dale's unwelcome suit to Viola
(Favoured in earlier times of his first youth)
Had been the sign for a relenting ear
To turn towards Clement Dorme. All this was plain;
And there was nothing to awake a fear
In ev'n her anxious mind.

And so at nights
In peaceful loneliness, she clasped her hands
Pausing in calm reflection, and caught back
The sigh that would have broken from her breast—
As though some Patience with a mothlike kiss

Had closed her lips in silence. Yet so great
And faithful was the poor neglected heart;
While where the honied wings of joy could swarm
In liberal prodigality, there seemed
A need to prop a sickly love, and help
The fragile blossom to sustain the weight
Of living hopes about it.

It is thus
To hidden services and low is called
The more exalted nature; and those gifts
Denied in show are inwardly bestowed;
The while with favours manifest is helped
The incompetent spirit, and the limping wing
Is taught by mild persuasion to upsoar
And seek a loftier air.

But Milicent
Most earnestly believed when all was past,
And winter merriments had died away
With the last sign of the departing guests,
That Viola was faithful, and but lent
Her facile gift of speech to sentiments
Within her scope; just as she criticised,
With wordy fluency, each new-made book,
And sowed her little crops of viewy speech
About the holy ground of arts sublime,
Nay, near the sacred silences of Life
Confused more reverent ears with frequent talk.

* * * * *

The winter months had slowly slipped away,
And then the promise of the Spring had come;

And hardy blooms, whose bravery belies
Their fragile sweetness, opened guileless eyes
To meet the fickle coming of the sun;
They squandered on the winds of boisterous March
Their little hoards of delicate delight,
And when the Winter stayed his fleeing step,
And flung his threatening gauntlet to the year,
They marked the time of the delaying Spring
With their mild calendar, and claimed the earth
In meek possession. Then, at last, bright June
Donned the first robe of summer's gayest hue.

And every early morning, with the sun,
Woke a swift hope in Milicent's patient mind,
That the fresh day would bring her news at last
Of Clement's wished return. But June passed by
And mingled with the dead things of the year,
And still the mornings entered bare of words
Or any sign from Dorme. She wished for him
In vague unrest and fear, as one who wears
The hours away in some great trust, and longs
To lay the duty by, and feel no flaw
Has marred its just completion. Yet no cause
Again of dark suspicion could she find,
For Viola's letters punctually arrived;
And folded midst the mass of girlish chat
There ever lurked a roseleaf sentiment,
Whose pensive prettiness she knew was meant
For sign of loving faithfulness to Dorme:
And Milicent as punctually sent
Selected copies of these words to him.
But still she missed the ring of deeper truth,

The great content of a surrendered love,
And it had tried her tender sense of right
To hear that Lawrence Dale twice found excuse
To visit Viola's home.

When mild July
Drew the first jewel of her finger off,
And dropped it midst her blooms of glorious rose,
Sighing to know her month of happy reign
Robbed of its earliest week, a letter came
From Viola to Milicent. It spoke
Of the dull length of Clement's strange delay,
And how the tiresome days of hope deferred
Made even July sunshine seem a weight;
And, had not Milicent a word of him?
And, would she come to break the irksome quiet
With her own presence?

Milicent, well pleased,
Journeyed to see her friend without delay;
She saw the call upon her was a sign
Of greater love for Clement than she dreamed;
And so she felt a hard thought melt away
And let a sunshine of affection spread
About her mind in happier warmer glow
Than she had ever known for Viola.
And with a quieter patience she could meet
The insipid sentiments and vapid talk
That marked the converse of Dorme's chosen bride.

One sunny evening, sitting at their work,
Milicent lent her kind and ready ear

To Viola's confidence, who still must harp
On Clement's longer stay. She playfully
Condemned him for the added term he took
Of absence; yet believed, perchance, he meant
To break upon his Viola suddenly,
Unheralded by letter.

Viola,
With that slow serious shaking of the head
Her friend had learnt to fear, said: "Men were false!
Yet! Could she have the heart she knew was hers!"
Then pausing, she with quick and sidelong glance
Scanned Milicent, as though to read the mind
Dreaded, yet laughed at by her, and went on:
"Suppose, sweet Milicent, I had a lease
Of riches for my life-time—had been born,
We'll say, the happy heiress of Dorme Hall;
Suppose this merely!" And she searched again
The face that leaned above the lily shield
Most passionately patient, with its looks
Bent on the skilful work. But at the pause
Milicent lifted up her earnest eyes,
And let them rest in quiet on the face
Turned sharply to her. "Yes? Suppose it so.
'Tis good to be the mistress of Dorme Hall.
And, as I trust, you'll soon beseem that post,
Gracing it, Viola, with those pleasant ways
That suit you as the colour suits the rose.
And then, again, there'll be your faithful love
To render to the man who gives you all—
Not only all his wealth, but the great gift
Of his entrusted heart."

"There! there! You prose!
'Tis I have need for trust!" cried Viola;
"Why stays he thus so long?"

"I say, he comes!"
Smiled Milicent out-spreading her white shield.

She saw the last fair petal was complete,
And now no room remained for broidered blooms,
Or shaded leaf, or loveliness of line
Traced from her tender fancy. And she laid
The work upon her knee, and raised her eyes,
Chance-led, to where o'er Viola there hung
A mirror oval shaped. Behind them both
Was a long window opening to the lawn,
And over this some straying tendrils swayed
Of jessamine, and purple clematis,
And leaf of passion-flower; and these again,
Caught by the mirror in reflected shape,
Twisted and moved within the oval frame
As in a living picture. Milicent
Took a smooth sheet and placed it by her side,
Thinking to trace a delicate design
Of leafy forms, to wile away the hour
Fretted with aimless words from Viola.

But lo! A wonder! She had raised her eyes
Again upon the mirror, when behold,
A face smote midst the tracery of leaves!
It held its beauty in the shadowy frame,
And kept her gaze transfixed. She saw again,
She dreamed, the lady's face; but decked with joy

And lit with happy lights of smiling health.
Less heavenly, less wonderful and great,
But was it not an image of her thought,
A strange reflection from her brooding brain
Tenacious of its memories, that thus,
Crowned with the wreathèd leaves, could mock her sight?
The eyes looked smiling past her, and sought out
The nook where Viola sat and moved her hands
Amongst the delicate china, and prepared
A dainty meal. But Milicent gazed on
As in a dream of worship, startled out
Of recollection and of consciousness,
And hearing without sense how Viola's voice
Evenly emptied out its syllables.

At last this phrase pierced her abstracted brain,
And touched her mind. "Ah! Milicent; you still
Deride me and my fears, and all I say!
But what a tangle's life! Now had I just
A right to take Dorme Hall *but not the heir!*
Then all my life and Lawrence's might run
To sure solution!"

As she caught the words,
She saw the imaged beauty in the glass
Waste in the pallor of a sudden fear,
And wear the ghastly colour of despair;
And then the picture vanished.

But her mind
Recalled its rapt and wandered sense; she rose
And gained the window with a light swift step,

Grasping unconsciously the lily shield.
She followed with her eager searching eyes
Until she saw *him*—Clement! Then she sped
Towards him, till she reached him where he stood
Leaning his face against a tree.

She twined
Her hands about his arm, breathlessly saying:
"As I live, Clement, she but spoke in jest!
She deems you are delaying your return,
And uttered petulant nonsense! That is all!
Within her scope, I *know* she's true to you!
Clement, I *know* 'tis so!"

He moved and looked
In the sweet face with tears stained unaware,
And in the earnest and up-lifted eyes,
With a bewildered gaze, as one who wakes
From a great blow, and slowly takes again
His consciousness of life.

Then she spoke on:
"Hasten before she sees us! You shall find
Another greeting waits you than you deem!
Speed, Clement, to the happiness you crave!
Speed quickly to that window!" With her hand
She pointed urgently; until he stirred
And, following her direction, turned away
Without another look or any word.

She walked behind him, anxious at her heart
In spite of confident speech; then stood awhile
Waiting to hear what further might ensue.

He entered as she bade him. A light pause,
And then from Viola there came a cry
Of unmistakable joy; then silence fell
Soft broken by a kiss. She moved away
With faltering step, up to her chamber door,
And, entering, laid herself upon her bed,
And crushed her face upon the lily shield
And lay in silence.

After a long while
She rose and wrote a note to Viola,
Saying, "she slipped away from all the joy
She would not stay to lessen, for she knew
That happy lovers flourished best alone,
And prayed that God would bless them."

So that night
Unseen, unquestioned, Milicent crept away,
And took her journey home, and found herself
Anew within her father's house—in trust
That now, at last, her peace would surely come.

VII.

Ah! my dream, return my dream!
Steal again thy joy to me.
Leave me not, O thought supreme,
Leave me not so utterly.
Ever by me goes the world
Like a hot and wasting blast;
And the wings of Hope are furled,
And the shadows gather fast.
Thou art slipping from me now
Though I clasp thee strong as Death!
Crying to thee, "Teach me how
I may still the voice that saith
'Thou shalt find me nevermore.'"

But the desolate long days
See the Lamp of Hope expire,
While along the darkened ways
Lie blank ashes of its fire.
Fair the Flower of Light is spent,
And the Morning Star is gone,
And the heart's own flame out-went
When the wistful dream was done
Evermore. Ah! evermore.

Is it Fate following with flying step
That overtakes us dallying on the way
Wherever we have found a resting place,
And slays each image of a happy peace
With its keen whispered breath? Or is it that
Our secret inward thought hath forceful power
And folds within itself potential life
Which, urging on its growth, allows no pause
Of restful lethargy to stagnate will?

Each flitting dream, each light and wingèd hint
That flees unchronicled across the mind
Drops its light seed; and when the reapers come
To gather up the harvest of the brain,
The unremembered grain hath opened out
To sure fructescence. And the dreamy soul,
Uplifting a fair visionary face
To trace unconsciously on changeful clouds
Some high ideal of loveliness in deed,
Hath made his choice; and lo! within his life
His choice again shall find him, and shall claim
A right to live as some transcendent fact
In an unchallenged beauty.

This is Prayer;
And Prayer more sure than Fate fulfils itself.

The silence of a dull December morn,
Hushed with the stilliness of falling snows,
Gave space for urgent thoughts to throng the ear
In constant whispering. And Milicent
Laid down her book, and yielded up her mind
To their imperious claim. The months had changed
Somewhat her former look; her face was calm
But touched with wistfulness, as is the face
Of one who sees a lovely-seeming dream
Break into hollowness and sets it by,
But never can believe the Fair not fair,
Nor damn with lack of faith the Unattained.

Such silence now had dropped upon the past
For five long months, she might suppose the links
Were broken that had bound her heart to Dorme,
And strangely made her life a supplement
In strong emotion to his own; and yet
The past lived in her present as a thing
More near, more real, than the outward shows
Of action and of interest; and her thought
Owned the weird instinct of unfinished fact
That ran towards completion. Thus her mind
Guarded a watchful readiness, and smote
The first warm earnest of her faithfulness
Into a welded habit firm and bright
Of practised honour. She had learned the news
That some delay had thrust Dorme's marriage day
Down to the winter months; and, as she judged,
Still did he live unwedded; his own lips
Had spoken of postponement three months back,
When once she met him riding slow amid

The quiet fragrance of the autumn lanes;
And they had stopped to utter commonplace
And hurried phrases—who once lingered long
About their talk to catch each other's sense,
Or drop some mutual confidence, forgot,
Perchance, at their last meeting, when their words
Ran with such heat and interest. He had shown
Something of the first friendship, and had kept
The same old genial bearing; but it brought
No fire of the old trust into her breast;
And her clear eyes, raised to his face, had missed
A manly firmness in his gaze.

Our words
And acts may speak our innocence, but looks
Betray us, traitor-like, against ourselves.

She had returned that autumn afternoon
Back to her home, more heavy at the heart;
And ever since had shrunk from the still lanes
That led the way to Dorme. Then Viola
Had writ but seldom; and the petulant notes
Were always little swords that slew the hopes
Of somewhere finding a sweet fitting fact
To reconcile her to her own deep pain.

And so that still December morn she mused,
Raising the phantoms of her by-gone dreams
In faint surprise at her old credulous mood;
Recalling, too, her strong unquestioning faith
In the assured victory of truth
And high endeavour—nursing this again

In times of darker stress, the while she felt
How the glad earthly pictures fade away
Into the pathos of a deep regret
And passion-thrilling patience.

As she mused,
A crashing sound of wheels and horses' feet,
That smote in hottest haste along the ground,
Chased back the dulness of the grey-clad morn
With the usurping colours of event.
She heard the pealing bell, and then she rose,
Shaken with fear, to know 'twas Clement's step
That clanged along the hall, and Clement's form
That stood before her in the little room
As in old days—a strange embodiment
Of her persistent thought.

His anxious brow,
Seamed as by blackest care, excused the mood
Of self-preoccupation that passed by
The startled pallor of her cheek, unmarked.

Even as he took her hand, his urgent voice
Preferred, in hurried words, his quick request,
The while his meaning to her high-strung mind
Seemed like swift lightning to outstrip his speech;
"Dear Milicent, my need must plead with me
For your forgiveness, that unheralded
I'm here to claim your utmost charity!
I beg that you will come without delay—
Come with me even now back to my home!
Death breaks our ritual of etiquette,

And snaps aside our fencing forms; and I
Have no less cause than this."

"Alas!" she cried,
"Your father! Is he gone?" She smote her hands
Together as in pain.

"Not so," he said;
"He lives to ask for you; your name has passed
His lips in strange reiteration, till
At last he bade me bring you. I am here,
As in obedience—trusting, Milicent,
To your kind pity."

"Let me come at once,"
Was all her answer. "Spare no more delay
In speaking now, but as we move towards Dorme
Teach me my service to him."

And she sped
Away, and left him standing in the room
So filled with memories of her and the time
When he, to deck the empty listless hours,
Had stolen the rich treasure of her love.
The very clock that smote on steadfastly
Seemed, midst monotonies of common sound,
To hide the long-past echoes of her voice;
The folds of the dark curtains were alive
And eloquent with presence, and her eyes
Lifted from thence again their solemn look;
The drooping wintry bush of eglantine
Reproved him, from its snowy hiding-place,

With the remembrance of a summer eve
One far-away July; and, ere he knew,
A long low wistful sigh broke from his lips,
And sent the tribute of a vague unrest
After the memory.

Although we flee
Away from our own acts, some place remains
To witness of them; and we may return
To feel how Time can shrivel at the touch
Of an eternal thought.

It was not that
His mind could fully take remorseful shape
About that past. Because the man that once
Misses the path of honour, and soft slides
To villanies which he could never plan,
Feels not the light of Justice striking clear
Upon his steps to teach him a quick truth;
He in that murky atmosphere remains
Which his own acts have drawn about him, for
His deed has claimed him, and led darkly down
His soul to lower level, and shut out
The horizon of a grander moral sweep.

And yet the godlike instincts of our mind
Not lightly can be quenched and be foregone!
To miss the possible highest in our deeds
Is like a wailing music in our lives
That shakes our souls for evermore from rest,
And tortures us with fleeting fruitless hints
Of Beauty unattained, that once came near

And flung its wing of light about our head,
And breathed the Unutterable Word.

And Dorme,
Standing amidst these visible memories,
Felt a grief welling in his inmost heart
To unshed tears. But Milicent returned
Wrapped in her furs; and in her quiet face,
That kept its pallor, he saw readiness
To do his utmost wish, and nothing more.
And so they left together for Dorme Hall.

The smoking horses rushed along the lanes
That, hung with mantles of untarnished white
And decked on every spray with crystal gems,
Showed through the blinding snows like a strange dream,
A momentary vision, that would fade
With but the backward glancing of the eye.

The silence of the softly covered roads
Smote coldly to Dorme's heart, and every thought
Uneasily turned to the consciousness
Of the slight form beside him; and dark care
Dropped the monotonous omen of its touch
Through every weary heart-beat. But her voice
Broke up the painful stillness with its tone
Of flutelike sweetness.

"Tell me now his need,
Your father's. Many months ago, a call
From him came to me; then it was I went
To answer with my presence; now again

It reaches me and strangely calls me back."

"You know not, Milicent, what heavy care
Hath chased me these few months. I thought, returned
From my long sojourn, that all would be well;
But first, Sir Basil Blount—steeped to the chin
In ceremony as his nature is—
Refused our wedding till six months had passed,
This spell of time being to his careful mind
A fitting limit to the dragging length
Of our betrothal. But the foe delay,
That laggard traitor in the camp of time,
Betrays our scheme, letting fulfilment drift
To an unmeasured term. My father's health,
Declining in proportion as his hopes
Climb to the summit, has sunk low at last,
And creeps along the valley shades towards Death.
Some thwarting sprite keeps pace with every step
Along our way; and when our feet have reached
What seemed the goal, behold it melts away
In some strange jugglery of circumstance!
Thus Viola and I remain apart,
And my position hangs uncertainly
Between assurance and the old sad doubt
That mars my life."

"But tell me of the worst!
Your father feels the thwarting of his plans
For your and *her*—your mother's sake, and takes
The deathly sickness of a hope deferred
Too long for human courage?" And her voice
Shook with the swell of tears.

"You argue right.
Could he have kept a firm and manly heart,
Watching his plans unfold to an assured
And quick fulfilment, all had yet been well,
And we two had been wed. But at that hint
Of first delay despair struck to his soul;
And with his hands uplifted o'er his head
He uttered one sharp cry of: 'O my God!
I *cannot* live so long as these six months.'
Then he was silent. And at first he went
Through his accustomed actions, rode each day
About his land, or sought his tenants out,
Or shot with me amongst the wild wide moors
As in old times. But all the while a change
Crept over him; and one by one he laid
His duties from him, till at last he moved
Slowly about the house and the near grounds,
Like one who broods and dreams, and loses sight
Of living interest in absorbing thought
Or brain-created care. Yet, had he held
The ordinary courage of a man,
Had not we been ere this safe from our fear?
And had not all been well?"

She struck her hands
With a quick motion up against her breast,
And sighed out: "If all's well, that he attain
To set you easefully upon your way,
Though his whole life be squandered, and his heart
Break slowly with its strife 'twixt hope and fear,
All had indeed been well!"

So low her voice
With secret feeling, that he scarcely caught
The sound between the rushing of the wheels
That whirled now on the hard and beaten road
Towards Dorme Hall. She glanced up to his face,
And saw the gloomy sadness of his look
As, lost in some reflection, he stared out
Upon the covered hedges and blank fields
That dipped their fringes in the pallid skies
And faded into mists.

The old sweet use
Of former confidence had so prevailed
That he forgot their altered circumstance,
And with old ease kept silence, or spake long,
And lost her conscious presence in relief
Of pouring, as of yore, his every thought
To her kind ready ears.

"Is there no more?"
She questioned, "I had fain that you should speak
More of your father, teaching me what way
Of help my course shall take."

"Yes. At the last
He asked me suddenly how time had sped,
And if the marriage day at length approached.
And I made answer that a fortnight hence
We should be man and wife; at which he lift,
With a great sigh, his eyes upon my face,
And bade me send for old Sir Basil Blount,
And with him Viola. And when they came

He looked upon his kinsman, and I saw
A sudden pallor steal away the hues
Of healthful vigour—such as yet remained—
From his stern face, the while Sir Basil stood
In courtesy before him. Then we knew,
With a quick thrill of terror, that the wing
Of Death had hovered near him, and the shade,
That fell like a dark veil upon his face,
Was thrown from presence of that awful foe.
But when we bent towards him, ere our hands
Were laid upon him, as a dying flame
Will flicker to new vigour, he revived
And lifted up his head, and with his arm
Gravely upraised, he signed us back, and spoke:
'Not yet Death's clutching hand avails to seize
The life-strength from me; I have breath to speak
And force enough to hold him from me yet;
And all this vigour and this force I spend,
My kinsman, in a last request to you!'

"He paused; and slowly back returned the red
And the old light unquenched shone from his eyes;
But a strange aspect of entreaty made
The whole a novel picture to my sight.

"He spoke again—his words were straightway writ
Upon my memory, for his voice was low,
Yet deep and solemn force ran through the tones,
His will compelling thus our listening ears—
'Sir Basil Blount, my hold upon this life
Is like a touch upon a skirt of mist
That flees before me o'er a mountain side.

I grasp—it slips and vanishes away!
Then lo! I see it trailing on some rock
An arm's length from me, and before I sink
I fling myself in spirit on that height
And struggle upwards! And I bathe myself
A moment in the life-refreshing dews,
And gather that light skirt within my hands,
And hold it in the passion of my soul;
But then, anew, it fades! it vanishes!
And thus my moments toil themselves away
In a vain effort. And, I know, I near
That mountain's highest; and, o'ertopping it,
The light life-mist shall hover for awhile,
And then shall spread its cloudy vesture out
And flee o'er the wide realm of a wide sea
To boundless space. And thereupon I plunge
My whole soul after—as a bird that dips
From a steep summit in its swiftest flight,
Into the farthest ether.'

"Then he paused;
Sir Basil would have spoken, but his look—
My father's—scared away the words from lips
That only carve out phrases. And I reached
A cup of wine that his attendant brought,
And held it to his mouth, and he went on:

"'Tell me, Sir Basil, fourteen days shall pass
Ere these our children that stand here shall wed?
But, ere that time be over, I am one
Counted amongst the dead. Therefore I pray
If this be possible, that now—at once—

To-morrow—at the nearest time you will—
This marriage shall be solemnized. Thus I
Shall close my eyes at last in such a peace
As God and Nature send the satisfied.
Sir Basil, you consent? And Viola?'

"Then Viola, my timid childlike dove,
Flung her two hands before her face and shrank,
Replying nothing. But Sir Basil, moved
Beyond himself, made answer: 'Ulric, peace!
We hurry on this wedding. You shall live
To see the thing you wish for made complete.'

"I know not what of soothing in the tones
With which Sir Basil spoke, fired up the look
Of strange suspicion which my father cast
Upon him; but his eyes were filled with wrath;
Then, leaving him, they wandered and sought out
My Viola standing near. He asked: 'Again,
If all your earliest be the possible late,—
Too late for me,—you promise no delay
For dole of ceremonial to this corpse
Shall push aside the marriage for an hour?
Let me in deathly slumber lie at peace!
You promise this?"

"Sir Basil, shaken out
Of every precedent by this demand,
Murmured a vague reply; and suddenly
My father raised again his eyes and laughed
A low cold laugh of scorn, that made us shrink
With its weird mockery. Then he stood up

In his old dignity, and bade me shew
Our guests all deference and courtesy,
And he himself anon would follow us.
I heard his slow and measured step pass through
The corridors and cease before that room
Which he has made his strict retreat. Yourself
Have seen that chamber's secrets.

"Then some hours
Passed ere we saw him. Viola would learn
The wonders of the Hall; and at his door
Paused longingly.

"'Twas while we lingered there
I heard him close and lock the cabinet;
And then I thought I caught a stifled moan.
Oft had I known him suffer thus, so felt
No urgent fear; but turned towards Viola
And led her straight away; for she was white,
And in her pallor whispered: 'Is it *there*
He keeps the will?'

"But well enough I knew
My father brooks no question; and I led
Her steps away, and let her chance-made speech
Wander uncaught by answer. Then I felt
A tremour take her—as a reed may sway
To the influencing power of unfelt winds
That stir not the great lily or poised leaf;
'Twas some emotion swept her in its course
And shook her sensitive spirit; I myself
Felt a cold dread whene'er my mind returned
Upon my father's words.

"At eventide
He showed his resolute face above the board,
And flashing looks proclaimed a vigorous mind
And will unbroken. Then when night was come
He left us early, seeming in good health.

"But at a later hour, a hasty step
That woke the echoes of the corridor,
And took the stairs in hurrying leaps, proclaimed
Some urgent need; and on our circle broke
My father's valet with his old face white
In anxious fear. He bade us come upstairs
To see his master. And we found him there
Upon his bed, sore-stricken as by Death;
And yet not dead. He rallied with the morn;
I saw him lying motionless; then watched
Some flicker of the old life come again,
As hues return upon the pallid clouds
From the sunk sun, like late-sent messengers
That creep above the low horizon line
Which hath engulphed the day. And then I saw
His eyes were open: he lift up that hand
Which yet retained its sense; and o'er his lips
There passed your name. I knew not at the first
Whether he dreamed, or whether 'twas a sign
For me to bring you. But at intervals
I heard again your name. Then, as the morn
Leaped into splendour, and sent frosty beams
To tilt with glittering shafts of light and joy
About the chamber, slow he turned his face,
With the old rare smile upon it, murm'ring out:
'Clement! my well-beloved!' And I leaned down

My head towards him; and I gave him drink—
While for myself I tasted bitter tears;
Death struck him as I saw, and with him slew
My present hope of safe and wedded peace."

Dorme paused in some emotion; Milicent
Guarded a breathless silence. He went on:

"All day he rallied; but at night the hours
Were driven images of woful life
And restless pain. Once, high he shook his arm
In wild emotion; and I could not glean
From fragmentary speech, or if his brain
Wrought with strange fancies, or his prisoned mind
But beat its vigour 'gainst the ruined sides
Of the poor body, as a rebel thing.
At early morn he slept, and when he waked
His mind was clearer; and I heard again
The name of Milicent upon his lips
Often repeated. Then the day revealed
These snows that ominously wind their mists
About the earth in colours of despair.
And when again I leaned my face to his,
Seeking with the new light to find what change
Might smite upon me, eagerly he said:
'Clement, 'tis morning! Bring that girl, your friend!
Bring Milicent, for I shall die to-night.'

"So urgent was his whisper that I flung
Out of the room, and waked the men, and ran
Towards the stable; and myself put hand
To help them with the horses. So I came—

For what grave import still I'm ignorant!
And this is all my story."

And he stayed
The voice that beat its words against her ear,
And drove the hurrying thoughts like flying rack
Across her mind in startling images
Of dark disastrous pain. She made no sign
And silence fell between them. Omened care,
Held back an instant by his vehement speech,
Returned upon him in a close embrace,
And bore him in her harpy arms away
To an unillumined place, where gloomy thoughts,
Like muffled sounds, dropped through the heavy dark.

But all the stress and storm within her mind
Bore energy and hope upon its wings;
The shifting winds of circumstance blew not
Unmixed disaster towards her; for she caught
The Eternal Whisper through the direful strains;
And, like a small brave bird, she poised herself
Amidst the whirling currents, and essayed
Upon that boundless trust her lesser flights
Of rapid winged thought.

'Twas at that point,
When from the clamorous road the carriage turned
Again upon the lanes and neared the Park,
That, clattering on the highway, rapid hoofs
Dashed out a measured sound, and like a flash
There passed three horsemen, in their gaudy red
Smiting gay coloured images of life

Between the dull grey mists. And Milicent,
Leaning to see the riders, caught the glance
Of Clement in her own; and hurriedly,
With forced indifference, he turned and said:
"They're soldiers from the town. Dale's regiment
Was quartered there last month."

A simple phrase;
And yet to one who stands in great suspense,
Feeling his hands grope towards the future days
To clasp the fingers of a strange event
That darkly nears him, any common sound—
As the grave striking from the old church tower
Of the ordinary hour—may seem like fate,
And curdle all the life-blood in the heart
With the sense of finished doom. To Milicent,
This news of Dale shot like a rapid fear
Amongst her troubled thoughts.

At length they reached
The long drive-line; and midst the frozen land,
Where all the sound was locked in crystal pause,
And the voices of the summer fell to rest
Beneath the enchanted whisper of the snows,
They passed in silence. Then they stayed before
The great hall doors; and Clement, leaping out,
Gave Milicent his hand to lead her near,
But when the touches of the icy air
Soothed her hot brow, there surged up forceful words
And called for utterance; and she drew back
An instant from the threshold, with her looks
Fixed on the distant hills, and thus she spoke:

"I know not what prevision in my mind
Urges my speech to you. Within your tale
I find one meaning plainly writ, and this
I strive for through my insufficient words :—
It seems, we spill our life's diviner gifts
While hunting some brief shadow of the hour !
Thus prodigally squandered is the wine
From the rich vintage of a father's love
In vain libations to unyielding fate !
Put now a period to these useless cares,
And for the last few hours bring him some rest
By showing an indiff'rence to your doom !
Know you, the gods hold ever best beloved
The passionate proud patience of a man
Who turns at their decree, and yet stands straight—
Bare of the armour of his circumstance—
In fate-compelling courage. Ah ! To me
The pity of it smites ! See how he spends
His life in struggling after useless aims—
To undo fatal acts, to mend the marred !
Absolve his last days from this harrowing grief !
Yours is the voice to bid the fetters fall
That bind him in this brain-absorbing fear,
And yours to speak him rest. I think we draw
Disaster on our head who fight too long,
Or tamper with God's Providence too much.
May we not spoil the music of our lives
By thrusting our rash hand upon the chords ?
I know not why I come ! Let me not add
One moment to his anguish ! All the words
I speak to him shall be the words of peace,—
Not one of further effort !"

And she stayed.
But Clement in a low reproachful voice,
With burdened eyes of past sweet memories,
Murmured: "Not thus! Can you forsake me too?"

She turned away and passed into the Hall,
Where Viola met her with her voluble words,
And sentimental sighs, and loud regrets.

VIII.

A wave at night upon the sea,
Tossing and heaving restlessly—
Tossing upon the secret deep—
Could never reach his rounded curve
Where the sweet shore lay in reserve
Beneath the watchful cliffs, asleep.

The unuttered music in his breast
Urged him upon his failing quest,
The shore—his harp—lay still afar;
And other waves that nearer crept
Passed out in songs that wildly swept
Beyond the earth, and waked a star.

She looked out from the silent night,
Her eye was soft and meekly bright;
She floated to the wavelet wild;
She drew her splendour to his breast,
And made his restlessness her rest;
And, midst his storms, her beauty smiled.

And when he felt that fairest ray
Stealing his restlessness away,
The music in his heart grew still;
He urged not to the shore in view;
The light of heaven which pierced him through
Had bound him with its silent will.

But lo! he saw the real star
Shining above him far and far;
Then thought he: "She is lost to me!"
He spent himself in one rash cry,
He bounded upwards to the sky,
Then lay in darkness on the sea.

His burden sweet lay scattered wide
In broken flashes on the tide,
And he himself knew, nevermore
Should light within his bosom hide,
Or music mutely with him ride
Towards a yearning waiting shore.

Fear and uncertainty dog all our steps,
There follows ruthless havoc from afar,
While disappointment swoops on stealthy wing
To the heart of expectation; every hour
Passes through peril, and no hope can bring
One touch of real assurance, and our joy
Accosts us as a fleeting visitant.

If on the way the solitary foot
Hath left its lonely traces, hurrying throngs
Of eager multitudes, that flee before
The ceaseless whip of Time, efface those prints
With their unheedy treading; and the cost
Of single vanquished lives is given unmarked,
And failing cries fade on the air unheard
Amid the shout of "Progress!" for the age
Hath made unto itself a phantom god,
And they have called the shade, Humanity.
He stoops not to them with a face of love;
But, for his sake, shall every one taste pain
Embracing willing loss and sacrifice.
But desolation with an icy hand
Prepares for the vast course a vaster pall
Of cold oblivion, and at the goal
Awaits an awful and unfathomed death

Wherein the futile clamour of the host
Leaps to annihilation.

This is Life
As to-day the hand hath painted it; aside
Are cast the tender colours of the past
With the canvas of their thought-inspired display,
And, in their stead, negation's coldest tints
Dash and obliterate the radiant hues
Of hope, and deathless love, and constancy
To the prophetic whispers of wise faith.

Yet something of the living ancient trust
That blest the early nations, still endures
Sequestered in the silence of the heart;
And this, more strong than science with her fiat,
Enfolds the promise of a future day.

Strange tenderness and stranger reverence
Touch on our apathy—as rays may pierce
Beyond a cloud-wrapped sun and softly play
O'er ice-locked waters, then, with scarce a kiss,
Gently uplift some slow unwilling drops
To wander into light and liberty.

Ev'n the poor finish of degraded death,
After the foolish tangle of a life,
Leads us, through mysteries of sympathy,
Beyond our human thought, and sets the heart
Athrob from touches of the great Unknown;
Till, o'er the pathos of our weakness, leans
(Or in our phantasy but seems to lean)

The comfort of the possible Father's face,
Softening the awful stillness of the dead
With traces of a momentary peace;
And waking in the living soul an awe
To feel a whisper from Immortal things
Sweeping along the hour—still faintly heard
And passing—as the stirring of a wind
Across the sleeping front of summer noon.

The night had passed but Ulric had not died;
The dim still ray of morn was creeping in,
And the chill whiteness of the earliest hour
Dispelled the flickering shadows of the night,
Impressing the worn features with the touch
Of tenderest pathos and a present peace.

Like a pale snowdrop on a wintry morn
Sat Milicent alone in the great room,
Tending his weakness with her little strength.
And now she watched the passing of the shades,
And welcomed morning, welcoming as well
The long continuance of dreamless rest
That fell upon the man's exhausted brain,
And lulled him into infantine repose.
Her gentle woman's ways and wise commands
Had brought a calm upon the shattered house;
Clement himself had yielded to her wish
And slumbered deeply all the night-long hours,
Thankfully trusting to her watchfulness.
The open door revealed an ante-room
Where Ulric's old attendant, for his need,
Had waked three days and nights; and now he too

Drowsed in uneasy sleep as one who keeps
His will alert for any sudden call.
And thus in silence, like unspoken prayer,
The morning hours escaped.

'Twas afternoon:
A glorious sun had burst the shrouding mist,
Revealing, when the haze had peeled away,
The white earth lying as a crystal carved,
O'erarched by the blue dome. Small fleecy clouds
Tinted with softest rose looked from the heav'ns,
And seemed like angels breaking their restraints
And crowding through the ether, each fair head
Lit by the wonder of an aureole.

Ulric still slept; for Milicent preserved
The shades of quiet around his silent bed.
But in the lower room the sunlight shed
Glimpses of coloured glory through the panes;
And mid the joyous dancing of the rays
Stood Clement leaning on the chimney shelf,
His hand light pressed upon his head; and still
Lost in his sombre thoughts. His eyes were turned
Towards the ante-room where Viola,
Bending above her work, stitched on and on
In strange absorption. Had the consciousness
Of lover's look bent on her called that flush
Of feverish crimson to her downcast face?
But Milicent kept by the dying man,
And midst the silence felt her every thought
Fall heavily and singly through her mind
With palpable strange shock—as one may see

Dew-crystals, from an over-shaken rose,
Dash in an audible shower through the air,
Drop after drop, with rapid flash of light,
Smiting upon the stillness. She beheld,
With the prophetic sense of faithful love,
How round that pleasant egoism of Dorme's
(Which always seemed to bring its own excuse
In wistful gracefulness), the shadows closed
Mourning and fateful, burdened with a doom
That darkly slunk behind them. And her love,
The passion of the prayer within her heart,
Was all the poor defence which she could give
To help and save him. Yet deep love is strong;
And overcometh death or any ill;
And nought avails to keep the reaching hands
Back from their object.

Strange is secret life:
Emotion's kindling element close hid
By this veil of outwardness! For Clement stood
Unconscious in his sadness, while her thoughts
Beat their great wings about him.

A deep breath
From Ulric made the maiden at his side
Turn with a new solicitude. His eyes
Rested upon her, strong, and bright, and clear;
And he up-raised himself within the bed,
Whispering: "Milicent! I am not dead?
Not yet?—not yet?—Now Heaven for this be thanked!
My brain is clear! my strength has come again!
And there are words to utter while I may.

Sir Basil is not there? Keep the man out!
Yes! Close the door on all but you and me—
Even on Clement!"

So she signed to him;
He turned towards the ante-room; and then
She heard him pass away with Viola
Into the corridor; and all was still.

A passing tremor took her, for so strange
The lonely watch appeared which she must keep.
But Ulric spoke: "Now give me wine. They're gone?
Sir Basil is not there, nor lingering still
That false Delilah?—I have been a fool
To bring them here to hang about my bed
And mar my moments with their harpy hands!
Some miserable fate obscured my brain
And made me think Sir Basil would consent
To wed them ere I died. But, while I spoke,
Death with his dart stood threatening! And then
I knew that he had struck me. And I felt
My life-long hopes were crumbling into dust,
And I must pass before I made them real!
Great Heaven!—such madness is our life! To build—
With heavy pains to heave up stone by stone—
Then, like the children with their wooden bricks,
To touch the last o'ertopping arch of all
And shatter down the edifice! So I!
Look you, sweet Milicent, upon this fool—
This Ulric Dorme—who let the traitors in
Upon him in the end!"

His voice had risen
And shook with fury; with his clenched right hand
He struck out blindly. Milicent reached forth
Her tender fingers, and she laid them soft
Upon his arm, and gently drew it down;
And turned her face upon him with a look
Of utter mildness that o'ermastered him.

"You wrong Sir Basil; and you wrong again
Poor Viola. They will not do you harm.
And more—they *cannot.*"

"Ah!" he said, "you see
The whole world through that glass of your own soul,
And think each one as perfect. Heaven be thanked
Who sent a woman like you at the last!
For I will trust you, Milicent, with things
Hid even from my son. I fear for him;
She'll weep before him as Delilah did,
And wrest my secrets from him!"

He broke off
And eyed her anxiously. "And I myself
Am but a fool to trust *you!*" Then a while
He lay in silent thought. She hardly kept
The starting tears that came at his rough speech,
But sat in patience, though her anxious heart
Throbbed with the longing to possess the words
Which Ulric promised. Would they not unfold
Some secret which would touch Dorme's future life?

But Ulric spoke again: "How wrapped about

Am I with terrors! They obscure my road
Like heavy mists that fall upon the moors
And shut the path away. I cannot see
The common landmarks—nor the beaconing lights
That guide me to a home of wholesome rest.
Rest! Rest! And Peace! Come down upon my life!
Nay! Rather come, thou one sweet guiding ray,
And show me the right step; then let me sink
Content into obscurity and death."

She found no words, but waited till again
He asked her: "Milicent, where is the way?"

'Twas a hard moment; for the man had turned
His eyes with dumb and dog-like questioning
Upon her face. Yet could she scarcely guess
The import of his question; and her heart
Was wrung with sorrow for him, and the fear
Of somehow spilling all the happiness
Of Clement's life with any unwise word,
Shot like an arrow in unproven skill
To reach or miss the mark.

'Twas in the stress
Of sore perplexity she answered him:
"Am not I as the leader who is blind
Yet offers guidance to a brother's soul
One with him in distress? I darkly cling
About the feet of Faith. Yet is there found,
When direful problems press upon the life
Asking solution, one and only way.
It is that we should cast ourselves in trust

On that invisible Power Who surely hides
Behind this moving show of circumstance.
Are we not His? And this is also His
That sore perplexes us. May we not seek
The highest right which to imperfect sight
Yet dawns, like a far star thro' blinding mist,
And sends a magnet ray upon the soul?
This found—and thank God, this is always found
For those who seek it—we may follow it
Step after step, like any wayfarer
Who gropes thro' darkness towards a distant light."

She ceased. He answered her: "Such rays may pierce
The lesser nights of pure and perfect souls.
For me, the darkness is a palpable thing;
And I am buried in it. This great weight
Of mist about me presses down my eyes;
And so I grope and grope about the earth.
No stars shine from *my* heaven, Milicent!
Find me the way within this mazy world
Not point me to the skies."

"Alas!" she cried,
"How know I whitherward your steps would tend?
But yet is Heaven not separate from earth.
Think not this world is under any ban!
Hark to the whispers of His Providence
Who ever guides us by the perfect code,
Nor leaves the standard of His Right untaught
To asking souls. Right is the only way."

"Ah me! How simple is your woman's life!

And this pure faith sufficeth? You've not caught
Your hours amongst the meshes of the past;
Nor feel how some far sin involves To-day
In hideous windings of perplexity.
No, no;—each dawn is an unwritten sheet
Whereon the tracing of God's finger goes,
And leaves but light behind. But every page
Of all my life is saturated through
With poison dropped upon an early leaf,
And, as I turn, the blot lies there before
And damns the fairest writing. O my God!"

"Not so," she sadly answered, "every life
Is like another—different in degree
And different in the circumstance, but chained
To the same awful laws. Yet is there hope.
We cannot change the past nor cleanly wash
The stains out of our life; but we may make
Even past evil subserve our higher ends.
Our will's untrammelled! We may take these flaws
And bend them to the pattern. Hath not dread
Forced us to call out fairer, purer tints
To overshine the darkness of those hues—
Until the varied colours in the end
Outvie the whitest?"

"Nay. The will itself
Hath its spring broken. Look you on me now!
How can I rise and travel o'er the past,
And patch my marred life with some better deeds?
I, Ulric Dorme, began this life as fair
As ever human being. I had hopes,

And there were heights within my soul's fair realm
Which I perchance had mounted. But it fell
That all my highest mixed itself with wrong.
The very angel from Heav'n's midmost throne
Lit on my life and touched it with his fire.
But lo! his kiss upon my cursèd lips
Bred there a lie, and deep within my heart
Unlocked a traitor viper. There's a deed
I did, which, being done, looked even to me
Too black for any mercy. 'Twas begot,
Maybe, from many lesser selfish acts
Hid in that easy egoism which thinks
The pleasant things of all the pleasant earth
Made for its grasping hands. But then, being done,
I stood—myself unto myself revealed.
Thus rush men into acts, and afterwards
Find they have loosed the fiend upon their lives!
Say! can I separate her memory
From my injustice? Tell me, can I lay
My son's reproach to rest? Yet—it was sweet,—
The sweetest and the blackest of all deeds—
And I am damned for it. You will not think
Your wholesome touch can cure a soul like mine?
What care should I have for my wretched soul?
Let my weak hands uphold this crumbling ruin
From falling on my son, keep her fair name
Buried in cloistered shades, all unexposed
To men's coarse fingering—and I'm content."

He lay in silence. Deathly grey his face,
The while his eyes burned with unwonted fire.
The room was dimmer than an hour ago;

The brazen rays of sunlight slunk away;
Through the high casement Milicent saw the clouds
Blush with the last kiss of the parting day;
Then round the house there went a soughing wind
And talked within the crevice of the door.
The very silence seemed alive with words;
Within the shadows something seemed to lurk,
And fear began to suffocate her heart.
Would Clement, absent with his Viola,
Perchance forget her in her lonely trust?
Even the old attendant snatched the rest,
Denied him for so long, in some far room.

At length he spoke. His voice smote out the words
With sudden emphasis: "You women hide
Revengeful thoughts beneath your gentleness."

She turned with pallid cheek, believing now
The sad wrecked mind was broken. He went on:
"Now say—has any told you, you are fair?"

"No, none," she answered mildly.

"But you know—
For here a girl's no fool—that these fair tints,
This wreath of brightest hair, and that sweet look
Which haunts you as the sweetness haunts a flower,
Holding the gaze upon it till the eye
Sees in the calyx visionary depths,
And dreams the heart of beauty lies concealed
'Midst the meek petals—this weird loveliness
You know that you possess. And, having it,

You know that it is something better worth
Than thus to hide beside a sick man's bed,
Or pine away unseen? Yet the rich gift
That gives this beauty value—the true heart
Your every way reveals—this has been stol'n
By some false man who has possessed himself
Of all your interest, and who took the years—
The best sweet years of all your woman's life—
Coming and going with fair-seeming face,
Until you wandered in a kind of dream
Through a land of happy days and sweet-rayed thoughts.
Then, we will say, he stabbed you with a word,
And left you to creep home and hide yourself—
As women do to fight their anguish out.
Poor little dove who mourns her ruined nest!
Poor empty casket with the jewel gone!—
We'll say, there's such a man! But you possess
A secret dagger that will surely strike,
And wake the traitor heart to answering pain.
Will you not use it? Milicent, I've skill
To teach you the true way. Strike! strike! For thus
I hold the hilt towards you. There are words
Which, being imparted, shall give up his fate
To your revengeful hands!"

Her tears flowed fast.
He heard them through the gathering of the dark;
They ceasing, thus her patient voice began:
"I would that Love revealed the soul of Love
To those who doubt his power. The mourning dove
Broods o'er the relics of her happy nest,
And haunteth with her silver floating wing

Her home of short-lived joy; throughout the woods
Her note is deeper for the loneliness,
Nor emulates the cry of wilder birds;
She could not choose the hawk's relentless heart,
Nor roam in fiercest liberty away
Forgetting love and faith."

Her voice broke off
Trembling to tearful silence through a sob,
But Ulric took her words, repeating them:
"'Forgetting love and faith.' Ah! Milicent,
Forgive me that my rash remorseless hand
Hath struck the tender bosom of a friend.
The man self-proved unworthy of a trust
Sees lurking in each human breast like sin.
I mind me how on me, unhappy, fell
A fiery dart of pain, what time I saw
The look, which long long days had tortured me,
Fade slowly from her face, and turn to peace
At the cold touch of death. I thought that grief
Had emptied then her phials for my lips,
Nor dreamed what bitterness remained behind
To flow through all my days, and turn to fire
Within my brain at last. But then they brought
My little son. And first I looked on him
In hope of comfort, with a father's love
Swelling the secret chambers of my heart.
But lo! about my springing hopes there crept
A poisonous thought and left the serpent's trail
Upon this trembling joy. The boy stood still
A little distance from me—his dark eyes
From under all that shade of clustering curls

Fixed on me wondering. But in those orbs
I pictured then the dawning of reproach,
And shook before him, as a traitor shakes
Before the thing betrayed. I knew reproach
Would look at me and follow me through life.
And thus it has been. And this grief at last
Has brought me to the grave. O God! To love
As I have loved and hurt the things beloved!—
When first I loved, how knew I, Love could turn
And hound me like a fury through my life,
Nor leave me dying? Know you, I have prayed;
Yes, through long hours my sad convulsèd soul
Hath raised a cry to Heaven that God would grant
The burden might be lifted from his life,
Which I had placed there—that the way might lie
Straight for his feet. So have I prayed; but still
Unyielding are the Heavens to my voice,
And God is silence.—There's no bitter dreg
Which I may miss to drink.—Why do I speak?
Here's that unlocks my tongue! They're surging words
That run like armies through my dizzy brain,
And pour upon my trembling lips! Say! say!
Are you a traitor?"

Milicent uprose
With shaking limbs, and softly lit the lamps,
Sending the mellow rays about the room.
Then, raising up his head, she offered drink,
The while she spoke as souls may speak to souls
At the last hour. "Look on me, Ulric Dorme;
Indeed no treacherous thought lies hidden here.
I am no traitor. Ne'er have I let slip

Your secret from my lips. And if, again,
You keep a word 'twould ease you to impart,
And if you seek a faithful heart to trust—
In deep humility—I say, 'tis here.
Should Clement's fate e'er lie within my hands
To death itself I serve him."

"Ah, poor reed,
On which I lean at last! For, if I trust,
Will it not break and pierce me?—Milicent,
My soul seems drawn towards trust and peace.—But, hark!
Beware how you betray me!"

"Would," she said,
"That peace would dawn upon your dying hours.
Bethink you that God's Providence is just.
Wings of His mercy brood above our lives.
Your deep repentance is of Him beheld;
There is no curse save to persistent wrong,
Repentance bringeth blessing. Be at peace!"

Again a silence fell. She heard the clock
Ring out the hour; then in the court below
The trampling of a horse, now nigh, now far,
Now dying in the distance. She bethought
How old Sir Basil had designed that night
(His kinsman's sickness seeming to abate)
To visit a near friend; he would return
With early morning. Ulric lifted up
His head and questioned: "Who rides thus away?"

"It is Sir Basil; he goes out to-night."

The light of some relief dawned in his eyes:
"Look you," he said, "I fain would rest awhile.
Send hither some one for a short half-hour
To stay within the ante-room. I'll call
When I have need; and should you hear the bell
Then straight return,—for I will speak with you
On secret matters. Look you;—leave me now."

She trembled to forsake him; o'er his brow
Death flung a shadow; but his lifted hand
Compelled obedience with its grave behest.
Therefore she left him, speeding quick away
Through the long corridors; and as she ran,
Softly on Clement's name she called for help.

Where midst the passages the shades lay deep,
Her heart leapt up to see a form that lurked,
Then slipped from a dark doorway. But she smiled—
'Twas only Viola. Again she called:
"Dear Viola, return a moment's space!
I seek for Clement; but we must not leave
A dying man alone; until he come,
Wait you and watch within the ante-room.
Your uncle has dismissed me. He would rest.
But, should he call, then touch at once the bell
And I shall come; nay, even should you fear
Ring only, Viola, and I will haste.
'Tis not for long. I send up Clement now,
Or else the valet."

All unwillingly
Stood Viola; then whispered: "Does he sleep?"

"He rests at least. You will not have the need
To leave the ante-room. We speak too much!
Haste we! Not long this watch is laid on you."

She slowly turned her steps without a word;
And on her careful errand, Milicent
Went hastening; down the dimly lighted stairs
And through deserted rooms she sought a sign
Of Clement; from the servants last she heard
That he was out—Miss Viola had asked
That he would watch Sir Basil to the lodge,
The horse he rode being restive. Even now
They thought that he returned. So to the hall
She ran; and, pulling back the heavy doors,
Let the escaping light rush on the gloom.

The stars looked down upon the frosty night;
The twigs with pearl were dotted; here and there
The faint ray of a wan and new-ris'n moon
Bewitched the leaves with her enchanted spell,
And turned them into diamond. All around
The icy air was silent. Milicent
Waited some peaceful moments till his step
Wakened the stillness. Then she saw his form
Enter the rays that, from the open door,
Streamed on the night, and caught him in the midst
Of sudden glory. Her remembered words
Sounded their solemn echoes through her brain:—
"To death itself!"

He saw her leaning there
Within the warm red rays and gently smiled,
Asking: "Pale watcher, say, what errand's yours?"

"It is your father's need. Now Viola waits
Within the ante-room. Me, he dismissed.
I trust that he may rest. But will you come?"

"I come. Stay, Milicent! First let us turn
Towards his study, for I promised him
To visit it. But many days have passed,
And I have left my duty still undone.
'Tis not for long you've left my father's side?"

"Some fifteen minutes. I had sent the man
But that they said 'twere pity he should wake;
Deep sleep had taken him."

The corridor
Down which they turned was dark, and Clement stayed
A moment for a light. "These servant dogs
Think darkness suits the days of our distress!
But here I do illumine it. My heart
Pressed down with care so long seems easier now.
You think my father's better?"

Thus in chat
The friendly pair walked on, and slowly neared
The door of Ulric's study. Suddenly
Both paused as in dismay, for muffled sounds
Came from the chamber. "Hist! There's some one there!"
He spoke it in her ear, and she shrank back,
An unformed horror creeping through her brain.
They listened breathless. Could it be they heard
The turning of a lock;—and then soft steps;—

And now a groping hand that touched the door,
And sought the handle? Clement set his foot
Upon the light; and, hid within the gloom,
Each anxious soul awaited what of dread
Might issue from the door.

'Tis ever thus
Life cheats us with surprises. Day by day
Chains of events are weaving cruel coils
About our unsuspecting feet; but we
Toil through the scheming brain absorbing cares,
And walk with eyes too constant to the clouds
To find how fate prepares upon the road
The snare that takes us. Then, with bruisèd heart,
We rise to see how evident the links
That led on to disaster.

Whatsoe'er
Of fearful guess or expectation lurked
Within their minds, it paled before the real.
'Twas Viola's face that furtively peered out;
And Viola's form that took its speedy flight
Along the darkened passage towards the stairs—
Like some ill-creature startled at its work
Who flees away, and leaves instinctive dread
Within the eyes that watch it.

Clement stooped
To reach his lamp, and struck again a light;
And then he looked on Milicent, in hope
To find a calmer thought allay his fear;
But when each caught the other's pallid hue,
Turning in sick despair, they looked no more.

And then he touched her arm, and led her in;
And when the door was safely closed behind,
They sought what change the hand of treachery left
To trace its story. Silently he stood
Gazing upon the cabinet; but she,
With hurried glances searching all the room,
Found out, at last, the clue. Across the panes
She saw no more the meeting of the leaves;
The broken tendrils, stirring in the dark,
Tapped on the glass importunate complaint,
And now the firelight touched the loosened sprays,
And now they fluttered back into the night.
Then, at her sign, he cast a stronger ray
Upon the steps without; and they could see
The imprint of a foot upon the snow
Cut cleanly, with the small mark of a spur
Curling the heel behind.

What mystery
Hid in these signs? Through his bewildered brain
There pushed a bitter thought. He raised his hand,
And laid it on the window with intent
To follow in his wrath. But from the act
New-coming terrors stayed him; for a cry,
Sent from the floor above, with one shrill peal
Shattered the silence,—Viola's the voice.
And then came hurrying feet; and then the rush
Of one along the corridor who called,
And urged him to his dying father's side.

In Ulric's room, they found the breathless crowd
Of terrified domestics. Near his bed

Stood the old valet, with his rugged cheeks
Drenched from the tender pity of his heart;
While in abandonment of quaking shame
Lay Viola, her half-length on the ground,
Her face pressed on the cushions of a couch,
Stifling, amongst the folds, her shuddering sobs.

The dying man lay back upon the bed;
The nerveless hands before him. 'Twas his eyes
Alone that showed the life that lingered yet
Within the withering form; and these, intense,
Burned with strange light and seemed to fold at once
The whole of being in their single sense.
Upon his son they looked with hungry love;
And then they turned to Milicent, so filled
With questioning entreaty, that she leaned
Towards him, dreaming that their pathos spoke.
"You still can hear?" she asked; he seemed to sign,
Or else 'twas only that a little hope
Gleamed in his face. Then, with slow faltering words,
She spoke to him: "The promise that I made
I shall remember; and it still holds good
Although I know not yet its full extent.
God send you peace! If he have closed your lips
'Tis for a merciful end."

He seemed to hear,
And looked upon his son; a little time
He lay as though he pondered; while they stood,
Clement and Milicent and the old man,
And watched in silence. Suddenly his glance
Lifted and flashed and widened; exquisite light,

As from an undreamed joy, passed o'er his face.
They knew not whence it came ;—if old delight
(The wanton trick of fading memory)
Played o'er his features, or if new-born bliss
Met him, awakening from the dream of earth.
But if 'twere this, the heavy veil of death
Obscured from mortal eyes the Immortal touch—
Save that the uninhabited cold clay
Retained the soul's last seal of parting peace.

'Twas thus death put a period to the pains
That vulture-like had gnawed upon his life.

IX.

Shattered upon the rocks and shoals of life,
My bark astray, what light, what hope had I
To guide and hold me 'mid the ceaseless strife
Of thoughts and wishes changing restlessly?
My heart—my compass—did itself betray
Me, most unfortunate, and, turning round
To each wild impulse, drave me on a way
Shoreless and harbourless as chaos unbound.
So had I drifted to some endless scathe,
Unanchored, undirected, unconfined,
But that Thy Hand from that remorseless death
Snatched me, and urged me (still adrift and blind)
Into a haven, where at length, by faith
In Thy great Will, my lawlessness I bind.

How full and deep art thou, O Life! The flow
Of many-changing waves, that with the tide
Ride on in rhythmic march, and singly break
Shoreward their foam-flecked curves, and yet that keep
The voice of the great-hearted ocean hid
Amongst the murmurous music of their fall,
Comes like the shifting sweep of varied days
That toss their treasure to us, and are gone
With hollow whisper hence—drawn one by one
To caverns of the past.

Swift-running change
How like a mockery thou wert! but that
Thou coursest ever round the unchangeable.
For by our own unaltered consciousness
We learn the firm reality that keeps
This errant change locked safely in itself,
We hear the one deep note, by lips divine
Blown with the thunderous silver of its peal
Across the swell of many-surging sounds,
Upgathering, in that soul-compelling blast,
These to harmonious order and intent.

Mid thoughts of dread sat Milicent, and while
The slow hours spent their length, she, wearily,

Turned in her brain the swiftly passing scenes
That ended in this moment. For he lay—
He, Clement—stricken by a torturing grief
That through the silence preyed upon his heart,
And, one by one, consumed the buoyant hopes
That had made light of sorrow. And she watched
Beside him mournfully, as one who strives
To follow fleeing hours and snatch again
That moment when, maybe, sweet yielding chance
Offered an instant, remedy 'gainst Fate.
Could it be true that, ere the living warmth
Had left the body of the old man cold,
Thus, on the head of his beloved one son,
Ruin and disaster hurled their direful darts?

She sat, re-picturing the bygone hours,
Seeming to see, once more, his pitying face
Lean to his dying father. Then again
(The room being quiet—Viola's swooning form
Borne thence—and they two being left alone)
She saw, in memory, how he had bent
Above the silent figure, with kind touch,
Tender and reverent, baring the cold throat.

'Twas after came the pause; and then the change.
For he had turned his white bewildered face,
And held his eloquent and empty hands
Outstretched towards her; and, at last, the truth
Dawned on her through his faintly whispered words—
The words that told how round about the neck
No longer lay the chain, nor on the breast

The hidden treasured key. 'Twas afterwards,
Like guilty creatures shunning every eye,
They gained his father's study. Then began
A hurried search, that ended when her glance
Fell where the flickers of the firelight shot
And mingled with the soft ray of a lamp;
There, was the gloom alive with dancing gleams;
And there she saw the key lie, with its chain
Trailing upon the ground, both, as it were,
Dropped by some hasty hand, that let them fall
Between the window and the mantle-shelf,
Far from the cabinet. This last, at length,
Trembling they opened, tremblingly they searched,
And found but emptiness. The filching hand
That stole the key had put it to its use;
And, with the Will, had robbed her heart's dear friend
Of name and wealth, position and his home.

Then he had reeled and fallen suddenly
Against the couch; and he had flung his arms
Upon the bureau near; and with one groan
Covered his face; and heavy silence came.
Three hours—he had not spoken; she had fetched
Cordials and wine; with tears had called his name;
Last, with dumb pressure of her hands and cheek
Against his shoulder, mutely took her right
To share his sorrow with him. Not a sigh
Or sound escaped him. Then upon the ground
She'd slipped beside him, with her one arm flung
Across his knee; and so had wept and wept,
Till now no tears remained to fall anew.
Ah me! The grief of those who watch with grief,

Sitting without the dark and closèd door,
Crying to enter. Could she only catch
The words that thronged the silence! hear the thoughts
That fled across that dark night of despair
O'erspreading wings of gloom, and in their track
Leaving a deeper shadow. Was there speech,
Or any comfort, might attain to touch
And lighten this great grief?

From out the hall
The striking of the hour upon the night
Roused her at length. She rose and softly left,
Walking with quiet timid steps along
Until she paused before the dead man's room;
The lamps burned low, and silence kept a watch
Beside his bed. She trembling turned away,
And lingered next by Viola's door; 'twas still,
Although the fire and lights sent out strong gleams
From every crevice. All had gone to rest;
The house was hushed and silent; next she passed
Towards the servants' offices. She sought
Such wholesome food as still within her reach
Remained, and made her choice with careful hands;
Then with her load regained the study door.
Entering, she gently spread the meal, and trimmed
The lamps and fire, making the cheerful blaze
Glow through the crimson colours while she drew
The heavy curtains round. He raised his head
And turned to look on her; then, instantly,
She stood beside him, though her heart sank down
To see how fixed and hard his face, how stern
The darkening of his brow.

"Clement," she said,
"Long hours have passed, and you have need of food;
Eat what I bring you; little time is left
For rest ere morning. When the morrow dawns
You'll need your all of strength."

He started up:
"Yes! You are right; I faint, and I need strength;
I'm thankful for your thought."

Then afterwards
He turned and said: "Draw round you this warm cloak,
And in your kindness aid me while I search
This matter somewhat further." And she stood
Before him, mutely ready for his call
To any service, though her heart beat high
With strange unrest and fear. His face was dark;
His tone appalled her in its cold restraint,—
All this, at variance with his eyes that burned
With wild fierce looks whene'er he turned away,
And in profound abstraction lost himself,
Rapt in apparent dreadfulness of thought.
He led her to the window: pulling back
The curtains, this he opened; then he took
A shaded lamp and asked that she would come
To trace the footprints further.

The pale moon,
Riding amidst the flocks of white-winged clouds,
Gave them a little light; the crispèd snows
Sent through the silence signal of their steps
In tiny crashing sounds. And then they saw

How the strange footmarks with the curling spur
Came on the window steps, then back again
Followed the garden path, and lost themselves
In the wild underwood and rank dead ferns
About the shrubbery. He led her on.
The patter of the fallen frosted snows,
Disturbed from leaf and bough as they passed by,
Followed through branch and bushes after them,
And filled the night with whispers.

Then he turned,
And with one glance beheld how yet the lights
Shone full from Viola's room. With a deep sigh,
That cut the keen air like a ghostly thing
And fled away in mist, he paused and stood
At rest amid the silence. Now a twig
Broke 'neath the lavish fringing of the snow
And fluttered downward with its load of pearl;
Or now the prisoned voices of the pond,
Heaving the ice, sent one sweet sounding note,
And faded into murmurs. Everywhere
The moon's fair wandering ray swept o'er the snows,
And with its spectral lip and phantom kiss
Touched branch and leaf. And everywhere was peace
Save in the heart that darkly held its thought
Hushed as the silent secret of the night.

He had forgotten her; but she stood near,
Her garments touching him, her earnest eyes
Watching the tumult sweep across his face
In visible pulsations. At the last
His stillness frightened her, and she put out

A timid hand towards him. With a start
He turned, remembering her; then mutely signed
That they, upon the way they came, return.

Anew within the firelight's welcome warmth,
The curtains drawn upon the scene of snow,
She waited for the next. But he held out
His hand towards her, saying: "Kindest friend,
Good-night. Not yet the wings of dark are flown.
Sweet rest be with you."

In a deep alarm
She answered: "Nay! I will not leave you thus!
Nothing is done! We've scarcely sought the Will.
To-morrow comes; Sir Basil Blount returns;
And we are unprepared! You have not said
What course we take, nor schooled me in my part.
I vainly search this mystery."

He smiled—
A bitter smile more mournful than a tear—
Repeating: "Yes. 'The morrow comes!' and you
Will then be just the same kind faithful friend?"

"What mean you by this question? Can I change
Within these fleeting hours?"

"Who was it then,"
He jesting asked, "who turned the river's course
In one short night aside? But, let me feel
To-morrow that you'll still be there, my friend."

"And how should it be otherwise? 'Tis but
My death could change me."

"You'll not melt away
Like spring-sent snows, or wealth, or love, or all
That seems the firm foundation of our lives?"

The tone was bitter, and her heart was chilled
With nameless fear. She said: "I shall not change."

"Then good-night, kindest friend! Again, sweet rest
Be with you till the morn."

"I will not go!
This night, till dawn, I join with you the watch."

"Not so. 'Tis late. E'en now it ill beseems
My sense of honour to detain you thus."

"Oh! Clement! Speak to me! I cannot go!
There's that within my heart that bids me stay;
Rest is not for this night. Why close your lips
And drive me from you without any word
To guide me for the morrow? We should use
These hours in seeking for the vanished Will."

"Why search? I know no search can now avail.
Shall I speak further? Tell you how last night
She filched the key from the poor dying man,
And came down here to meet her paramour?
A little act! And she could plant her love
Within the heart of prosperous plenteousness;

Why pause at lesser questions?—Oh! 'twas Dale
Who carried hence the Will; 'twas she who turned
The key within the cabinet!—I loved
A creature capable of crime like this!"

His voice was harsh and dreadful; and his eyes
Burned with a sombre fire.

"Shall I believe,"
She said, "that either Lawrence Dale or she
Have planned this villany?"

"Thus hath it been!"
Cried Clement: "Women sell their souls for love—
The same being backed by pelf. Her choice lay not
'Twixt Dale and *me*, but Dale and this estate.
Have I not *known* it all these gloomy months?
Here was a chance of tossing in one scale
Dale and these lands against my trivial self!
What wonder if at once I touched the beam?
And with me honour, heaven, or anything
That hides the name of virtue!"

She stood still,
While through her mind the hurrying thoughts came on,
Each with a flash that brought to painful light
Some memory of Viola—and these
Wrote guilt against her name.

She found no words
Or to deny his charge, or comfort him;
But stood, with ashen cheeks and trembling heart,

Viewing the dreadful measure of his grief.
" Perchance she will repent," she said at length.

" She will, perchance," he answered. " For my hopes
Repentance comes too late. The Will ere this
Is but charred ashes. Then, how—how could I
Embrace the viper that has stung me thus,
E'en though she came and crawled about my foot ? "

" There must be remedy ! Where justice lies
Sir Basil will be prompt."

" And who's to point
The way to justice ? Think you that my pain
Hath so far mastered me that I could drag
Her honour through the mud, who once stood here
As my affianced bride ? My claim is nought.
Without the enginery of the law
I am no son at all. Can I assail
The courts of justice to restore my rights,
And, on the bare chance of a poor success,
Hurl her upon her doom, or show the facts
My father hid so long ? No ! Milicent ;
There are some wrongs remediless on earth,
The remedy so far o'erruns the hurt.
And here's no remedy—save one ! save one ! "

" Ah ! Clement ! How is't with you ? "

" 'Tis a grief
That swoops with a fell claw upon my heart
And tortures me."

"Could I but take the pain!"

"Dear gentle friend, Good-night. You must not stay.
Nay, Milicent! You anger me at last!
Kneel not, nor cling about me. Weep not so!
Why wish you thus to linger?"

"I'll be mute,
Seated in some far corner; you'll not know
That I am with you. Only—not alone,
No, *not alone*, shall you watch through this night."

"Thus have I chosen. See, you anger me!
I wish for loneliness and quiet thought."

"With early morn I may return to you?"

"With early morn? Yes. Come with early morn."

Blinded with weeping; sick with nameless fear
She reached her chamber, and upon the ground
Down-flung herself in great and passionate woe.
She scarcely knew her trouble; through her mind
There throbbed strong wordless prayer—
Entreaties wild that found no conscious end.
At length she rose, and, loosening all her hair,
Unbound the dress about her and drew on
A warm dark wrapper. Then she heaped the fire,
And once again upon the ground she sank
To lie in silent watch. Most still and weird
The hushed house seemed that, o'er this hidden woe,
Slumbered unconsciously. She could not frame

Right pictures of the morrow, or see plain
How Viola and she could meet, or how
The secret grief must to the wondering world
Surely unfold itself. Her troubled thoughts
Bewilderingly rushed through her aching brain,
Until, at length, o'er her exhaustion crept
Sleep, dreamless and profound.

The full-globed moon
Rode, disentangled of the curling clouds,
Along the sapphire heavens. Her affluent rays
Squandered the silver silence of their light
Upon the western windows of the Hall,
And lay in order on the floors beneath.
And there the shadows moved, like airy hands
Floating, escaping, urged by gentle winds
To sweep with eerie touch the magic chords
Of a colossal lyre.

An hour had passed;
Then Milicent from out that world of sleep
Upstarted to a sudden consciousness.
She heard the moaning of a wandering wind
About the chamber; on its parting wings
She thought, in waking, that a voice went by,
Repeating solemnly in low deep tones
Her vow: "To death itself." 'Twas Ulric's voice;
E'en now 'twas near at hand; the echoes seemed
To ring within the room, as wide-awake
She stood spell-bound a moment.

For such space

She waited; then by some strong impulse driven,
With headlong haste along the passages
She sped, nor lingered till she reached the door
Of Ulric's study.

There she listening paused.
And through the tumult of her heart, she heard
His slow sad pacing. Should she venture in?
No; rather she would crouch without and keep
Her watch unseen. And so, amongst the shades
She slid to hide herself.

But suddenly
His step ceased at the door; he opened it,
And stood thus, in the chamber's glowing lights,
Plain to her straining sight. Her heart beat low
With premonitions dark; she saw him there
Wrapped in his coat, as one who meditates
A sudden journey though night hold its sway.
And while he paused, she read his face and saw
Gloom on his brow, and fire within his eyes,
And fierce resolve that set a cruel stamp
Upon his countenance.

He closed the door;
And once again 'twas darkness. Then he turned
Swiftly towards the west wing of the house,
She following as swift.

Ah! To what end
Thus stealthily amongst the glooms of night
Take they their silent passage? The cold air

Seemed to awake and live as they went by;
She shrank before the cavernous dark rooms,
Then feared them from behind; but still she pressed
Close and more closely after him.

At last
He paused before a door that opened wide
To the great gallery; he passed o'er this,
And entered next a long high room. Here stood
Memorials of the prowess of the Dormes,
Strange steel-clad figures, seeming in the light,
That fell upon them from the frost-clear moon,
To live prepared for some grand tournament.
Here weapons, curious-shaped, long out of date,
Hung on the walls; here many a cabinet
Enclosed old relics of the family.
Quaint tapestry and portraits decked the sides,
Those fluttered ghostly at the opening door,
These caught the moonlight in their spectral eyes
And seemed to smile at an old thought of life.

And here his destination, for she knew
No entrance save the one by which they came;
Here then she waited. All the western wall
Was bright with windows; and his moving form
Cast a long shadow, blotting out the rays
A moment as he passed; but they again
Leapt back to their full light. She saw him stand
Before a cabinet of glass, and then
He softly turned a key within the lock.
Within, she knew, lay jewel-hilted things
With sharp and murderous blades; her heart stood still

To think upon their cruel cold array
At this dark lonely hour. She saw his hand
Hover amongst them as in careful choice;
And then he drew a small revolver forth
And thrust it in his bosom; next he took
A dagger; and he tried the glittering edge.

Her limbs were cold and faint; a horror seemed
To breathe about her, and her whole soul swooned
As though plague-burdened blasts were sweeping by.
Was this the phantom of her brain? The room
Was full of noisome whispers. Should she sink?
No! Heaven send help! She moved and locked the door,
Snatched out the key and thrust it in her dress,
Then stood before the entrance.

At the noise
He started back and turned; but she was still,
White as the driven snow, her arms out-stretched
Trembling towards him, her dilating eyes
Unswervingly fixed on him.

Terror first
Leapt to his features; then a frenzied rage
Mastered his face and madly swept away
The very likeness to the man she knew.
He stepped towards her, bearing in his hand
The shining dagger; swift along the room
Came his light foot, and now his angry breath
Was hot upon her cheek; and then his voice—
That seemed not his—spoke harsh within her ear:

"Thus have you dared to trifle with a man!
Stand back, mad girl!"

She neither answered him
Nor yet obeyed, but dumbly kept her eyes
Fixed on his face; the fury of his look
Blinded her sight; she seemed to waste in fear,
Yet would not stir; and then she felt his arm
Roughly around her and he lifted her,
Helpless in such a struggle, from the door;
He tried the handle, and his madness grew
To a new violence. That same strange voice
Demanded hoarsely in her ear the key—
"Yield up," he hissed, "the key!" But her grave eyes
Never removed their gaze. "Mad reckless girl,
I'll kill you for the key!"

She thought he would;
She could not save or hinder him, being weak;
But she could die. Her body, at the least,
Should lie between him and his ghastly doom;
Perchance it might avail. And then she pressed
Her either hand upon the place where lay
The hidden key; but scarce a tremor passed
Over her wan white cheek.

And then began
The silent awful struggle of two souls,
The one intent to save, the other mad
To leap the barriers and plunge himself
Upon that black disordered realm, wherein
Each momentary impulse rules in turn

The fury-driven spirit. All his blood
Ran hot within his veins; a glowing spark
Leapt with each pulse from out his throbbing heart,
And withered in its course the milder thoughts
That stayed the cry for vengeance—justice swift,
Not waiting on the tardy Hand of God,
But rushing on fulfilment. The rash mood
Of frenzied violence—bequeathed to him
From some dark ancestry of ages past
Unguessed, or caught perchance from treacheries
Writ in Italian blood—tore to mere shreds
The manners of that skilled and calm reserve
Which marked him as an English gentleman,
A gentle knight, the kindly Dorme of Dorme.

He saw the dauntless spirit of the girl
As nothing but a maddening obstacle;
The matchless quiet of her gaze compelled
His will an instant; then it but availed
To drive him o'er the bounds of frenzied wrath,
And make the leap to crime a possible thing.

She felt his arm about her; but she closed
Her fingers tighter on her breast; and then
He laid his hand upon her; the dark cloak
Went slipping backward; with a vain wild moan
She struck her weak arms upward with such force
As frozen terror left her; then she felt
A cold sharp pain, and down her robes of white
There ran a thin red stream. The moonlight whirled
Before her eyes in circles; in the midst
She saw the shining dagger and his face;

And then the solid earth swooned far away,
And all was darkness.

* * * * *

Awful depths of Life!
Mysterious human heart! Infinitude
Is on thy either side; thy reach above
Seems an unending progress; and below
Thy fibres move in elemental things
And meet primeval fires. Say, what art thou,
Thou tendril, quivering with this passionate blast
Or reaching out thy timid touch to Heaven?

How dost thou cast the shadow of thyself
Upon the world, O man! When curious youth
Weaved the first visions of the primal age,
The heavens were peopled and the wayside brook
Lived even, in thy deep imagining.
But now thy tutored mind hath looked upon
The fond spare dreams; and like Pandora's dower
The treasure, lying open, lifteth wings
And leaves thee empty. And thy poverty
Sees in the skies its like; thou hear'st no more
The possible music of the moving spheres,
Nor yet the Voice that whispers through the depths
An answer and a promise to thy cry.

Earth hath encompassed thee; and all this force,
Which to thy sense moves blindly round the beat
Of thy poor consciousness, hath moulded thee
And still that pressure drives thee on the way.

Whither, O fated atom, art thou tossed?

Shall a wild impulse that hath maddened thee
Count as thy blame? Or shall a lovely deed—
The flower of aspiration—seem thine own?
Art thou not as a channel, that receives
One sounding wave from an unending tide
Of alien emotion; or again
As the round dewdrop seemingly self-decked
In coloured glory, that but draws a ray
From the unconscious sunshine?

Where is Hope
For thee, tossed fluttering on the shoals of Time
Amid the eternal storms? Lost is thy bark
That rideth anchorless upon the waves,—
The stars of Aspiration and of Hope
Torn from the mantle of the mourning night.
Thou slip'st along the ways of every wind
Of innocent desire and changeful thought,
Until some passion drown thy freight of good
In one disastrous moment. Limited
By the restricted vision of thy mind
To things above, the unlimited breaks out
Upon thee from the dark and surging depths.

Where is thy Hope? Until the daystar rise,
Until it chase the shadows of the night,
Ah! link the varied mystery of thy soul
To all the highest of thy immortal dream,
Locking thy weakness in one steadfast thought.
Aspire! Aspire!—in that thy feet tread near
The darkest confines, and a lip of flame
O'erflows towards thee from a lurid hell.

These, the credentials which thy vision brings;—
Faith still is possible, and Hope, and Love;
Our nature's bound not yet is tied to earth,
The spirit's spring within us gives the lie
To those who damn with unbelief the things
Which man's right heart conceiveth. This is Faith;
To cling about the everlasting skirts
Of Glory sweeping o'er the shadowy plains
Where nations trod before us; to put forth
Our claim upon the Beautiful and Good,—
Our right to spurn the baser earth and lift
Ourselves up to the level of our dreams.

Nor melts thy vision in the searching sun;
Nor pales thy dim ideal in truer life;
Nor hath the stern stress of the coarser day,
The world's calm scrutiny, the wear of time,
Slain thy just dream or negatived thy hope.

What time thou doubtest if the Fair be true,
Trace thou the Fiery Hand that ever goes
Through the historic pages, writing there
"I am," amid unnumbered human words
Upgathering all meanings in itself.

See, jewel-like, the same Ideal shine
Upon the nations' front. See how for them,
(God's spirit moving o'er their restless hearts),
The thoughts, long pondered amongst separate souls,
Heaved out to life in some transcendent form
Round whom the peoples gathered, and whose feet
Trod out the sacred road.

Dim art thou now
As setting star amidst the passing mists,
Thou mild Osiris, crown of Egypt's brow;
More bright thy shining, O thou heavenly Buddh;
And lit with light like thine come lesser souls
Set on the same path to the same fair end,
Dropped as the luminous thoughts of God to guide
Our darkness with a light which is not theirs.

And last, the perfect message; the Great Word
Whose furthest echo is a living force;
The Teacher most divine, the wondrous Christ,
The Saviour from our selfishness and sin,
The Anchor to our nature's lawlessness.

* * * * *

She lay in Ulric's study; this she knew
Because through her closed eyelids came the glow
From the red curtains. Then, she was not dead?
She could not speak, or lift her eyes, or stir,
But such a burning pain shot through her arm
She knew she must be living. Some one moved
Near her, and then she heard a strange voice speak.

"Ah! that will do; now lift the head, and touch
Her lips with wine. Why, man, you tremble yet!
Well, well; the sight of blood turns some folks' brains
When they're not used to't, as we surgeons are.
You say, *not* call the women? That is strange;
But, as you urge, she might prefer the thing
Was huddled up in mystery. 'Twas well
I chanced to pass the night here. Do you see

(And here's a pleasant study), take the arm—
This something sharp you say she fell against—
Well! had it struck one hair's-breadth of an inch
To the left side—one hair's-breadth I repeat—
Her life might possibly have flowed away,
While you came blundering to my room for help!

"But as it is, she's safe,—fairly escaped,
Poor white frail thing. But it was passing strange
To wander lonely through the Hall at night;
It scarcely suits her looks. Was she o'erstrained
With watching by your father?"

"Yes. 'Twas so.
She fancied, as I must presume, that she
Had still some errand from him laid on her.
I—happened to be up—I found her thus—
She fell and fainted, striking out her arm
On something sharp. Carter, I'll thank you much
To keep it to yourself. 'Tis just the thing
The world works up into a cruel tale;
And she is honoured in my thoughts, and was
Honoured of him who now lies dead upstairs.
She shall rest here until the morrow dawn,
My own hand tending her. You say all's well;
I'll call you at the least unhappy sign.
Now take what rest you can."

"Well, as you will!"

She heard the door close softly, and again
She tasted wine upon her lips; and then

There followed a long silence, while she wished
She could have stirred or spoken. In her heart
Rested an untold peace, a deep relief,
A thankfulness for peril over-past.

At length she heard his voice, with a long sigh,
Whisper: "This silence is too terrible!
Wake, for Christ's sake, again!" And then she knew
How his eyes watched her. Softly he raised up
Her head upon his arm, and tenderly
Murmured again: "Awake, dear Milicent."
And then her eyelids opened on his face,
That bent above her with a yearning look
Of deep solicitude.

"'Tis early morn,"
She whispered.

"And you've come with early morn,"
He answered, scarcely knowing that he spoke.

Then did their looks meet mournfully awhile—
The deep soul burdening their eyes—until
His head dropped down at last upon his hands,
While great sobs rent him, and such wild-sent tears
As men may weep but once within their lives,
When on their strong-built reticence and calm
The storms of life have broken mightily,
And left them as defenceless children are.

She feebly lifted up her unhurt hand
And let it flutter down upon his head,

Drawing him to her; and it chanced, that thus
It was her bosom which received the stain
Of that great weeping.

When he calmed again,
She asked: "How was it, Clement?"

And he said:
"A hand had smitten me, I knew not how;
A treacherous blow had fallen through the dark;
And all my life was slain—nothing was left.
And then there ran a thought like flaming fire
Throughout my mind and burnt up every wish
In the one deep and passionate desire
After revenge. There came a maddened thirst
To feel my dagger in Dale's treacherous heart;
It was to me the one thing worth an hour
Lived on amidst this desolating pain.
And afterwards—I thought it—there'd be death,
Quick certain death done to me by myself.
I made my plans, I meant to go at once,
And in one night end all this misery;—
The stab first, afterwards the well-aimed ball.

"But then you came; I know not how you came;
I saw you but as one who wished to snatch
My single hope, my deeply craved relief.
The rest I scarcely know; I cannot tell
Whether I thrust at you, or by mishap
You struck against the knife; but on my arm
You lay as dead, and down your white robe ran
A hideous stream. O Milicent! I waked

Out of my madness, and I thought you dead,
And knew myself your murderer. It was then
I bore you here and called down to your aid
My father's surgeon. Ah! my agony
When you lay lifeless in my arms, and when
The surgeon with a white face, stooping down,
Began to search your wound. Now know I 'twas
A chance alone that saved you—that I kneel
Beside you living, who might have knelt here
Beside the friend I'd slain."

"It was not chance."

"And on my other sorrows, I have heaped
Shame and remorse untold, unspeakable.
Tell me, dear tender friend, is the hurt great?"

"Not great, my Clement; nothing to the joy
To find you by me."

"Ah! The morn has dawned;
And you are here; and my projected crime
Lacks still its deed. But like a nightmare dread
It foully swept my brain. It was your hand
That saved me from it. Yet!—Could I have died
Who live to face extremes of misery!"

"Not die, dear Clement. No! Live on! Live on!"

"How shall I live when everything is lost,—
"Lost—lost—sweet Milicent?"

"Not everything."

"I loved her. I had trusted all my heart,
My life to her. I think upon the words
Whispered within her ear. She had those times
When a man's mind seems loosened from the hour
And guesses at a higher lift in life,
Dimly perhaps; —yet, many clear resolves
Were writ about her name. She's scattered all,
Made it a mock—a scorn—and turned me too
Into a would-be criminal."

"Not so.
You never could have done it. 'Twas the stress
Of nature struggling with this sweeping woe,
The cry within of unimagined pain
That sought relief. O Clement! Would that I
Knew further comfort! Yet, there's one thing left;
Amid this ruin, you have still yourself;
You still may rise above it all—unhurt;
There's that which loss can't steal."

He bent and kissed
The wounded arm, as though he would have said
How little scatheless so far had he come.
But when he raised his eyes she smiled on him,
And to his soul there passed a peaceful thought;
A thought such as surprises drooping minds
When, on a harsh cold morn where winter's heel
Hath pressed its iron mark, and all the joy
In earth and in the heart is shrivelled up,
A little daisy—small untimely birth—
Lifts its unlooked for sweetness from the ground,
And whispers of the spring.

He rose and said:
"Will you not sleep awhile? We must not try
This strength of yours too much."

"I cannot sleep,"
(She lifted up her soft imploring eyes)
"'Tis better you speak on."

"Well then," he said,
"While you lay still, there wandered through my mind
Echoes of words you spoke just two days past
Upon the threshold of the Hall. And then,
They sounded harsh and hard, but now they come
Burdened with truth to me. Sad, sad, and strange,
That what we crave too much we shall not have,
While that from which we would defend ourselves
Creeps ever nearer, like a stealthy foe,
Upon our craven heart. Life shows me this:
Our fear's our fate; our dread fulfils itself!
Therefore—too late, perchance, for nobler ends
But with my remnant of poor dignity—
I put on acquiescence. Here I turn,
Embrace the fate I cannot shun, and set
Myself at least one step within the right;
Nor wait I till my certain doom o'ertake
Me, most unfortunate. When morrow dawns
I shall inform Sir Basil of my loss—
That there's no Will. Then without any word
Of what we know, I straightway set her free
From her detested troth; and in the stead
Of undesired marriage, I shall yield
All that she has desired into her hands,

To be forever hers. But one small thing
I stipulate:—it is that she shall hide
My parents' secret, and that she receive
All as my freest gift. Let the world's tongue
Wag as it may; my own shall still be dumb,
Both on her crime and on my mother's shame."

He ceased and looked on her. She seemed to see
Afar the dawning of a promised Hope
That, like a pale birth from disastrous clouds,
Rose up and hung a hovering star-like ray
Above the dusks of dread. Within her heart
Deep thankfulness o'erflowed, as thus she found
He would achieve the highest that remained.

She lay and pondered. Then she said: "All this
Rings of the best and truest. Yet a word
I fain would speak, but that I fear to probe
A wound that is so sore."

He touched her hair:
"Speak on, my gentle friend."

"Ah! then," she said,
"Give Viola a year! I cannot think
The heart is hard in one who still is young.
Remorse already smote her when she came
And found your father dying; marked you not
Her anguished weeping? Seems it not to you
Too stern a thing to close up every door
Against repentance, possible though late?
Give back her troth to her, and, if you will,

Found this upon your altered sad estate;
But say—will you not do this?—that you take
A year wherein to search for the lost Will;
And if in that time nothing creep to light
Then all is hers. Your eyes must let her know
You wait for justice from her. Clement, say,
I ask too much, perchance?"

He sat in thought,
Then with a sigh replied: "No, Milicent;
You have judged right. 'Twere easier, maybe,
To break at once each link that binds me here;
But for her sake for whom you plead, 'tis well
To set my foot upon the patient round
Of many waiting months. But think not I
Have any hope in this; I will not let
Hope creep again upon me to betray.
No! no! I'll leave the Hall and to my work
Come in more serious wise; straight I begin
That life that suits with a poor nameless son,
In some obscure retreat.

"Yet will I hold
(If but for your sake only, who have kept
My failing honour for me with your life)
I'll hold, I say, the signs of my descent
From noble ancestors, in such fair deeds
As mark me worthy of the name they bore,
The name that's mine by right."

She looked upon
His beautiful dark face, and read therein

A manly earnestness, and in his grief
Depth so profound it seemed to blend with peace.
And through her heart there floated old fair words
That came she knew not whence; but, as a string
Reflects an answering music of sweet sound
In a dumb instrument, when tuneful chords
Are smitten near it by some random hand,
So on his speech there whispered through her mind
This, in respondent echo: "A white stone
To him that overcometh will I give;
And on the stone a name—a new name writ."

She turned to him the pathos of her smile;
But on her smiling broke a shower of tears;
And she lay weak again upon the couch.
He bent above her, saying: "Speak no more!
Sleep, Milicent; I'll watch by you the while;
Then will I take you to your peaceful home,
For you must leave the sorrows of this house."

All was as he had said. He took her back;
Then he returned and in unshaken will
Carried his purpose with Sir Basil Blount,
And broke himself his troth with Viola.
He but remained to see his father's corpse
Borne to its quiet rest within the grave;
Then in the valet's care he left the Hall,
And turned his back upon his fair domain.

X.

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I hear the gathered and upheaving waves
Scatter the message of the distant seas
Upon the silence of the hollow caves
In measured shocks and grave monotonies.
But brooding winds upon the golden air
Lie with their stilly folded wings enchanted there.

Peace in the sleeping ether ; then a dream,
An apparition of a faint-hued moon
That, ere the sun withdraws his flame-red gleam
Over the western edge, escapes too soon
From the wide wave to tremulously float
Upon a light-filled heaven, pale, wonderful, remote.

But as she wanders upward in her calm
She casts a silver net upon the seas,
And binds the turbulent murmurs with her charm,
And chains them in her mystic silences ;
And fair and wider is her influence shed
Till sun-wove colours of the magic west have fled.

Quiet pencilled clouds above the sunset lie,
As o'er a dying passion patient thought ;
And then a throbbing star hangs in the sky,
And all the wonder of the day is wrought.
But strange and serious hope come in that ray
Telling the splendid dawning of a distant day.

Days of a sweet content, mild days of rest,
The smile of Nature on us, every hour
Gliding along the sunniness of joy
Into the twilight of remembered peace;
Fair halcyon moments of existence, when
Our truant happiness remembers us,
Returning with a soft repentant step
To haunt forsaken ways, and gently bring
A long slow smile of rest upon the heart
That mourned her absence.

Life may sometimes turn
A page like this, and let the aching eyes
Dream o'er the golden letters of a leaf
Wherein the spirit of sweet happiness
Hath been the ready scribe. This is our own,
Our little poem in a world of care,
The place to which our sad frequenting thoughts
Return and hover, yea! a living page
Whose letters, thrilling with unuttered sound,
Turn into music when the notes have struck
Their fine vibrations on our memory.

Blest are the souls who, in their happiness,
Lay more than in their grief, upon the lips

The finger of a reverent restraint,
Letting the chastened mind of fortitude
Serenely rule the gladness of success.
These draw the wings of unwooed bliss a-near,
These keep her whisper wandering round their days,
Nor ever leave a desolated place
From which the rashness of their eager hands
Have driven the presence of their comforter.

'Twas Italy. Not in that land's deep heart,
But where her margin dips into the sea,
And sweeps the olive shades upon the blue
Of that great tideless water whose slow wave
Scatters its music to a golden round
Of sun-loved countries. And it was the Spring.
The lichen-covered olive branches bent
Above the glory of the flower-decked ground,
And mingled the sweet odours of their wood,
With scents of violets, pensive narcisse stars,
And wondrous shadowy lilies.

It was here
That Milicent, recovering from the shocks
Of sorrow, through a ring of lovely days
Welcomed the breath of sweet returning health.

For, from Dorme Hall escaped back to her home,
Illness had struck her, and that year-past spring
Held her a prisoner. Then summer came;
But she had drooped and languished on, until
The autumn chills began; then she fled south,

Her father with her, and the good old nurse,
Christina, eager to watch over her.

But as the days came round again to touch
The anniversary of Ulric's death,
Ere she had breathed a month of milder air,
A letter reached her; 'twas from Viola.
With earnest and with humble prayer it begged
That Clement would delay for one year more
The transfer of his property; her words
Were few, but plain the letter's purport ran.

For all this time not once had Milicent
Seen Clement's face. She knew, while she lay ill,
That he had ridden from the neighbouring town,
And with a deep solicitude inquired
After her health. She knew he often came;
But when recovery blest her, then no more
His horse stopped at their gate. She heard of him
Earnestly working, and of the old Hall
Deserted by its master. Gossips said
(For once their words were clean upon their lips)
In life the father and the son were joined
In such a wondrous love, that now he shunned
The place left vacant of the old man's step.

Neither had Clement written. Milicent
Nor saw nor heard from him; but Viola
Thus broke the silence 'twixt them.

Then she sent
The letter to him, sad, with doubting mind,
Wondering how this would touch him.

But there came
A short stern answer: Viola might learn
Half her request was granted; six months more
He gave her; after that his will was fixed.
Meantime the rents and income of his land
Would lie, as they had lain for all that year,
An untouched harvest for her.

Milicent,
In her sweet mercy, added a few words;
She wrote them underneath his own; they ran:
"'Tis only full confession and amends
Can ease your heart. I still will write
Your friend."

Then nothing more she heard, except a thing
Chance wafted to her. 'Twas that Lawrence Dale
Was called to serve in India, and had gone.

And then the months passed by, until the spring
Reached her in Italy. And suddenly
Her languid heart beat strong again in health
While onwards flowed the quiet melodious days,
Like soft-sent songs that float above a swell
Of sound and music through the vibrate keys.
For in that lovely land of lovely notes
The tremors of the colour and the light
Blend in their richness into waves of sound;
The quivering sunbeams thrilled like smitten chords,
And in her ready brain went echoing on
To rhythmic measured murmurs of sweet words.

Oné day, a full moon ere the dream must die,
And they must leave fair Italy behind,
She wandered on the bright Cornice road.
The sleepy curling of the slow-spent wave,
The tinkle of the horse-bells, and the voice
Of peasants breaking on her quietude,
Their soft "Buon giorno" as she passed along,
Lulled her to deeper reverie than wont.
And yet she craved that even this sound cease,
And yield her leisure for that deeper voice
That speaks in Nature's stillness.

So she left
The gardens where the rounded golden fruits
Hide in the shining glory of their green;
And where the fig-trees twist fantastic knots
Beneath the shadow of the stately palms.
She left the quaint-built streets; the merry strings
Of dark-eyed women with their burdens poised
In dusky weights of olives, on their heads;
The lazy youths who urge the creeping mules,
And sing wild snatches of their native songs,
And seem like moving pictures as they go.

From ev'n God's quiet acre did she turn,
Where sleep the tired souls who reach this land,
And breathe the purer air, see the deep blue
Of Italy above them, and lie down
Content beneath its quiet for their rest.

She climbed the olive terraces, and there
The night-blue cypress shoots its stem erect

Amid the twists of hoary boughs, and draws
Its line of strength and steadfastness across.
And mounting higher, until her feet crushed out
The scents from myriad needles of the pine,
She found the hills had left their skirts of grey—
Their nun-like olive vesture—and put on
A greenness of the freshly-springing firs,
That clung about them like a misty scarf,
And floated sparely upwards to the crests
Of rugged majesty, where stood the pines
Circling the tops with awful shadowy crowns.

Through all the pleasant heats of afternoon,
Amid the hidden paths and wild and sweet,
On through the secret solitude of hills
She climbed, until she reached a brow that leant
Silent and pondering over an abyss.
There clustered stately pines; the pillared stems
Sent up their dominant lines, and loftily
Swayed over-head a curtained foliage
Wherein great murmurous whispers hid themselves.
For even in the still air, like the sea,
The voices of the pines reverberate
As from a natural organ; mighty airs
Haunting the moving shadows overhead
Flow on the silence round about the feet,
And seem to wait a Master's touch to loose
Their pent-up melodies in swelling notes,
And wild crescendos.

Then she ventured near
The bare and rugged edge, beholding how

The land had run a thin projecting line
Across the silver ripples of the sea,
And these flowed either side in airy rings
East, West—then on into the golden South.
Afar, lay Corsica asleep in light.

Behind there stretched the dusky secret woods,
Around her was the air, below the sea
And azure sweeping on unendingly.
And midway in the sky swung the great sun
Statelily nearing hour by hour the West,
Pouring more lavish splendours as it sank
Slow to its bed of glory. Every peak
Glowed now in crimson light; the olives turned
To amethyst, the solemn pines put on
Their purple vests, and every rippling wave
Was tipped with ruby, and a great cloud lay
Carved like a chrysolite against the sky;
And all the bright Cornice road afar
Curled like a golden thread about the land.

Borne on the breath of Nature's healthfulness,
What wonder that reviving thoughts should stray
Into her mind. What wonder if she held
Their brightness prisoner and sealed them hers?
She felt the past slip backward like a cloak
Leaving her unentangled, glad, and strong.
Out of great anguish calmly had she risen
And looked and mastered it; and now she stood,
The secret of her own heart known to her—
The strength and measure of it. And she smiled.
What wonder that she smiled! Her dreams were dead?

No; they had blossomed to realities;
'Twas only: in the past her ignorance
Wrongly foretold their blooms. Now the deep heart
Wherein their seeds were sown, garnered the fruits,
And all her pondering thought pronounced them good.

The past was as the long and difficult path
Which she had left behind her when she came
And, passing through the music of the pines,
Trod to the open of this heaven-loved place.
Now, from her elevation, the light wing
Of memory flitted backward o'er the years,
As a white moth amid the twilight hours.

When such a moment to our life may come,
And memory leads us on through retrospect,
We may be thankful if her steady eye
Be true and still unflinching. If she pause
Awhile o'er pages that our folly blurred,
Let us not murmur that she con so well
The lesson, to our half-unwilling ears
Repeating it anew. Humbly we joy
If out of all life's failure and dismay
We bring one flower of an unbroken hope
To bind about our brow; if we can feel
That we have thrust our way amidst a maze
Of many treacherous thoughts, and stand at last—
Conscious, perchance, of stains and deep regrets—
But freed of falseness, calm, with lightened eyes,
And firmer courage.

Milicent thus stood

Reflecting calmly how the years of youth
Had fled, and left no treasure in her hand
The world had knowledge of; but in her heart
A hidden wondrous harvest garnered up
Of Thought as deep as Life. She had no fear;
The future like the broad and changeful sea
Lay with its unrecorded lights below;
And here her eyes with their deep glow of peace
Rested in silent ecstasy.

She stood,
Her hands light clasped before her, statue-still,
The pines her guardian and her fearless soul;
The gentle breeze frayed backwards from her face
The errant locks; and on her parted lips
Unspoken words seemed hovering.

Then lo!
The sun slow dipped his red majestic robe
Within the western sea; while from the east
Rose his fond shadow, rose the mellow moon,
The fair attendant spirit of the eve;
Her hair was in the wave, a gauzy veil
Of cloud fled lightly from her lucid brow,
And on the waters spread a silver sheen;
While, as a sign betwixt them, in the height
Of all the central south there sprang a star
To sudden beauty through the sapphire sky;
The peaks rose darkly with their clear-cut lines;
The land was like a cup with broken rim
From which the plenteous liquid over-flowed;

A deeper murmur woke within the pines,
And all the colour fled, and it was night.

She turned, and with a faint regretful sigh
Began her quick descent, and reached again
The shady olive terraces, and caught
Anew the peasant voices.

In the town
She passed the large hotel; and there she heard
The nodding horses tossing their bright bells,
And knew that here some late arrival came.

Walking on quickly to the garden path
That led to her own home, there at the door
She saw the old Christina, anxious-eyed,
And paused a moment smiling, with the lights
Of happy thoughts upon her brow, then spoke:
"You wait for me, Christina?"

"That I do!
Where have you roamed so long? A friend has come—
I know not who—and in your father's room
Has sat this past half hour. He waits a meal!
Depend upon't he does!"

"Then let us haste!
See, good Christina, I have not forgot
To purchase something as I passed the town;
Here are the fruits and sweetmeats, here a cask
Of luscious cream. I'll see the wine is clear,
And heap the golden oranges; there are

Some where a crimson stain of colour runs
Deeply within the rind. See how these flowers
Will make a garden of our pleasant room;
And now I pile the fire with olive logs,
Ah! how they smell of all the shadowy woods!
Think you the stranger's old? We'll have this chair
Pushed nearer to the blaze; soft slippers thus.
Heaven send my father have not let him starve
Too long on open casements and grave talk!
He must have journeyed far. 'Tis warm enough
To leave that window where the sleepy sea
Lets in a murmuring music, and the star
Slides to its sudden grave within the wave.
Christina, set the little kettle here
To send its merry song amid the logs;
Ah! my sweet wood, how well your beauty burns,
And how the little sparkles shoot along,
And flash, and dart away, as if they knew
You are too lovely for their angry flame!"

A little later was the table spread;
And Milicent leaning to the window, pushed
The dark Venetian wider. On the tree
She heard the green cicala chirp and sing;
She heard the wave upon the pebbly shore,
The cry of peasants from afar, and then
The booming of the hour from the great clock
Which served for time for all the town. The air
Was breathless with a full unspoken joy,
And hushed the heart that felt it.

But a step

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But a step

Broke on the stillness, and she turned, and gazed
At first with an incredulous look, then smiled
A grave quiet smile, for it was Clement Dorme
Himself who stood before her.

"Milicent!"
He held her hand a moment silently.

"Ah, Clement! You are welcome."

"I have come,"
He said, "for four weeks' holiday. The South
Drew me away from nipping winds of March
To taste the splendours of this golden air."

"And you will stay at least this night with us?"

"I left my luggage at the near hotel
And there engaged a room. But with your leave
I'll gladly join you at your evening meal.
Then, on the balcony shall we not sit?
I fain would feel how far I've left behind
My musty books, how far my office lies,
While I behold the lights and shadows move
About the mild Italian night. How like
A jewel lies the land rimmed by the sea;
And how the sky hangs out her burning lamps
To flash new glory to it. Hark, again,
To those soft melodies upon the air!
One notes not if they're voices, waves, or bells,
Or only the cicala on the tree,
They flow in such sweet harmony with all.

Even the noise of horses on the road
Is but a pleasant rise and fall of sound .
To ears o'erwearied with the constant clash
Of rattling wheels upon the hard-paved street
In our coarse northern towns."

She looked on him,
And marked the unwonted pallor of his brow
The weariness that travel had not given,
And spoke in haste about the foreign ease
That rests the brain by contrast.

"Clement, come!
Sit you where you can see that one sweet star
Caught in the meshes of a spray of leaves
That curls the window frame. Then all the time
There's something fair to lift your eyes upon.
How like a fire-fly tangled in a web
It seems from where we stand! Then afterwards
We'll carry to the balcony these seats;
And you shall have the little table spread
With wine and almonds, and the savoury nut,
Citrons and figs, and shadowy purple grapes,
And all things that beseem Italian skies.
Christina brings the coffee there; and I
Shall hear the story of the last long months."

She took a bunch of violets, and pushed
The tender blossoms near, that thus soft scents
Might breathe their welcome to the traveller,
And soothe his weary brain. These services
She had prepared for any who might come;

But now how happy was she that her hand
Might tend and cherish thus her dearest friend.

And through the meal, he often lifted up
His eyes; but not so much upon the star
They rested as upon her peaceful face,
Or agile fingers, or her graceful head.
But through her kindness and her tenderness
He saw a subtle difference; something free,
Untrammelled, far-away, spoke in her air
And bearing, while her eyes kept that great calm
Above her smiling, which the hills had lent.

Then on his spirit slowly sank a sense
Of desolation; what had he to do
With this sweet room, the fairness of the land,
Or that most gracious woman? He looked round
And found how loveliness reigned everywhere,
Not wealth, but touches thrown unconsciously
Out of the dreamings of an artist soul
That yearns to action, or from fancy sweet,
And wild, and wayward as the fragrant vine
That held the light imprisoned of the star.

Ah! How this land of beauty suited her;
The smiling skies had drawn her fairness out
As sunshine heartens up a drooping flower;
A mellower tone had come within her voice,
More vivid colour ran within her veins
And lent her bright vivacity, her wreath
Of hair clung closer round her peaceful brow;
And in the lovely light of her sweet eyes

He sought in vain the trouble of the past
Or in her carved calm lips. He watched her tend
Her father with strange envy, and he saw
The dim old face light up and greyly smile
With a reflected sunshine. She had grown
Sweeter in losing youth than having it;
In opportunity of the old days
Why had, to him, no clear foreseeing thought,
Shadowing the beauty of her fullest flower,
Come savingly; had she not haunted him
As melodies that float within the brain
Constant, provoking, then slip by again
Unnamed, unknown? But now she grew complete,
A perfect music; yet no more his touch
Recalled that wild sweet strain. Would it might come—
The old despisèd melody—again,
Nor leave him with the harmonies gone out
From all his life forever! Memory
Moved busily about the by-gone days,
And let him view, with judgment purified,
Himself and actions—everything was plain;
The past lay open in a scorching light
And silently accused him; while she sat
As bright and free as any creamy rose
That swings its fragrance from a happy bush
Amid a thrush's singing.

But the night
Was sweet, and on the balcony he felt
His calm return, for in the dimmer light
She was to him the Milicent of old;
And looking on her features, cameo-wise

Carved on the dark, most tenderly severe,
He watched a vine-leaf dip towards her brow
And catch the moonlight to itself, and seem
A milky star that hovered o'er her head;
But she was still—yes! as she used to be,
And he took courage, for his heart sore ached
With longing for her sympathy.

"The days,"
He said, "are longer than a year of time
Since we have met. For me, I cannot shake
Myself so fully free from my old home
As not to feel an exile; in the streets,
Within my musty office, through the roar
Of men and traffic, I can hear the cry
Of peewits whirling o'er a scanty lea;
I hear the brooks that curl their mimic wave
About great flints, and see the stream divide
On either side towards the fern-decked banks,
And in the hollow seem to lave my hand
And touch the merry trout; I hear again
The free-blown breezes through the clefts of rock
Or round the stunted trees, and underneath
I feel the springing of the embrownèd turf
Or sweet elastic heather. Ah! the while,
'Tis only smoke and noise that wrap me round
With unfamiliar sights to which I turn
My almost giddy looks, things that must be
Daily surroundings through which once I passed
Careless, unheeding as an alien thing
This common toil and ugliness, the airs
Of fair lands being about me. Then there flash

Before my aching mind the freshest meads
Of swaying feathery grasses with a braid
Of May-flower and the jewel buttercup,
And such a hum of insects in the air
The very sunbeams seem to burn in song.
Or, yet again, I lave myself breast-high
In bracken, at my feet the couching dogs,
My gun about my shoulder, and the clear
Serene of ether spreading fleckless blue,
And one hawk hovering with its bow-shaped wings
Amid the golden air. But oftener comes
A wayside bank, an innocent poor place—
The thickset hedge was over it, and there
The nut-tree thrust its clusters, and the briar
Pushed coral berries, and the briony
Fell like a fountain; underneath, the lane
Covered itself with grass—'twas over-grown
With gentle Eyebright smiling to the sky
That owns the same deep colour. There I sat
Once long ago with *him;* it was our own;
One of our many nooks of loveliness;
He spake of my fair heritage to me;
A redstart hopping near pecked on the ground,
A blackbird sang above. And there it is
I long to fling myself, and to the earth,
The mother-breasted earth, importunate
Complain and pour my sorrow.

"For my change
I could not seek the heather and the gorse,
The dear familiar hills, but south I fled
To newer beauties."

Then she saw his mind
Was over-wrought with trouble and the strain
Of turning the strong current of his life
To uncongenial duties; these few months
Had traced more lines of sadness on his brow
Than all the years before.

"You stay," she asked,
"A little midst the olives ere you pass,
Perhaps, to Genoa and the lovely round
Of Italy's fair cities?"

"I shall stay,"
He said, "the four weeks here. I am not for
The whirl of travel; and the fairest sights
Oppress a weary brain; I'm for the hills
And country; it is you shall be my guide,
If you will grant it so."

"I gladly will,"
She answered; it was still so natural
For her to give, for him to take from her;
Her gentleness could never say him nay,
Nor wished she to deny him; and she set
Her mind at counting o'er the loveliest spots,
The freshest and the freest, which her feet
Had conquered ere he came to her. She said:

"With you to help me we can reach the snows;
Beyond the firs and pines the peaks still rise,
The cloud sails awfully amongst the trees,
Or hides the bareness of the rugged rocks

In veilèd mystery; but this divides
Slowly and strangely, and I long to pray
Before the curtaining folds sweep quite aside
And show the heart of purity within,
The innocent grand snows."

"Ah! Milicent,
You choose the thing that suits me, something cold
Severe and awful; would that I could feel
The majesty o'ercome me and lift up
The trouble from my brain; and would that I
Could find the prayer that from your gentle heart
Escapes so easily! For know that I,
Within my narrow lodgings where I feel
Often like something caged, have leaned my head
Upon my arms, and after the dull day
Have felt a cry go forth to something far
Towards which I yearned—with longings unexpressed
Thrusting petitioning hands. When all the world
Goes slipping from our feet in sudden crash,
And we are hurled upon the wide abyss
And dreadful, can we help but fling our arms
Towards any possible sun? To think that Life
Drags us through torment thus, and shuts us down
In keen emotions and in torturing pain,
Cheats us with having into bitter loss,
And huddles us to death."

"This is not life,"
She answered in her calm. "Your one prayer cries
Against disheartening creeds. The sunlight lies
Not closer than the presence of a God.

Bethink you what a far and alien thing
The sun seems to us, yet the golden rays
Link our orb to it, and we are as one—
That being our life; then that our centre owns
The touch of other fires, and through our veins
Run sparks that had their source in those far worlds
And wondrous lying all beyond our ken
Or our imagining; thus are we joined
Even in material and lowest forms
With the invisible; the common things,
With every rarest, own a glorious birth
And claim affinity with quenchless fires.
Far, are they from us? Far indeed they seem,
And yet the wandering ray from all that dark—
Dark to our eyes—floated unerringly
And kindled here the rosy joy of earth—
Our little earth pinned fast to unknown suns!
Oh! golden staircase of unending life
Down which we float as motes upon the rays,
To what sweet end *He* knoweth Who *is* Life!

"Seeing these things how shall we justly say
Emotion came not hither from a touch
As distant yet as near—still unconceived
Yet to our thought akin? We are but breaths
Heaved out from the eternal breast of God.
What matter by what laws it is we find
He hems us in? Or by what ordered links
He chains us one to other? All our heart,
Our secret conscience still affirm Him there,
And beat with answers to His questioning.
We feel the finer elements amid

Our clay that prove us alien; and we shrink
From those who give the lie to that strong sense,
That consciousness, no reasoning has the power
To prove or yet disprove. We will not turn
Earth's pathos to a desolating jest,
But—all the worst unproved—we must believe
The undisprovèd highest."

Then he said:
"And sorrow, Milicent?"

She changed her tone,
And dropped the rich contralto, while she smiled
A tender smile, as though a household hand
Were laid upon her with familiar touch.
"In the beginning"—softly she spoke now—
"Sorrow's a bitter bud; but afterwards
It opens to a fair deep-hearted flower
And feeds on secret dews."

"And what of loss,
Longing desire cut off unsatisfied?"

"A rein," she answered, "showing us the way;
A thrust which drives us from a dangerous place;
The message of a King that we should step
Higher within his honour."

"Life is not
A mere disaster and a dreary jest?"

"Trust Life," she answered: "yea, and trust Death too.

Sit here a little, I will play to you
The strain divine which the great master made
And loved of all his music."

And he sighed,
Seeing her pass within. But when she played,
Her soul, upon the keys divinely spent,
Made music turn to pathos and the pain
Of passion, yet withal meetly restrained
By truth and will and calm.

Thus many weeks
They lived together in the perfect land;
And Milicent saw the trouble lifting up
From Clement's brow, and in a thousand ways
Knew a strange difference in him, for no more
His words struck coldly on her earnestness
As once of old. And oftentimes she saw—
Watching him as he sat lost in his thoughts,
His sad dark eyes lifted unconsciously
Upon the glow of the Italian skies—
The shadow of his mother's greater soul
Deepening within his face. Thus passed the time
In peaceful happiness; she was to him
As words to music—words that do not speak,
But meet the melody and seem to blend
Their inspiration in the yearning sound.

But then the sunbeams turned to fiery swords,
And drove them from their Paradise. One eve,
The last before they left the happy south
And journeyed northwards, out upon the hill—

The sea and sky before them like a dream,
And they in thoughtful silence—Clement lay
His half-length on the ground, and Milicent
Sat by him with her fingers lightly clasped
Upon her knee, and her fair steadfast face
Turned seawards from him. Suddenly he spoke,—
The words broke from him half unconsciously
Urged by the gathering pressure of his thought:
"Oh, sweet wood in the bitter waters thrown,
Stay with me till the bitterness be past!"

She turned her quiet eyes, for her fair soul
And innocent was slow to understand,
Keeping the freshness of eternal youth
Flowing amid the growth of elder years;
But she perceived he watched her, not the sky
And not the moving sea.

"Oh, my wild rose
Leaning towards the troubled wave! My peace!
My sunshine after tempest! Italy
Will mean your name from henceforth; I shall fold
These sweet scenes in the memory of you.
A memory only? Nay! For I will say
My dearest hope in life!"

He would not speak
Further; he lay again and watched her face;
Her eyes were downcast now; he could not read
Her features, nor upon them could he trace
One ripple from the thoughts her silence hid.

* * * * *

'Twas two months later. In her English home
Milicent was alone; the grey sad life
Of her poor father fading suddenly
Had left her lonely with the duty gone
That filled and blest her days. Her love, cut off
From active service, lived within her eyes
In deeper tenderness, and prisoned there
Looked out in wistfulness. More patient now
And quieter than wont, she kept his books
Around her, ordered all things as he wished,
And felt his presence—his, who always seemed
A shadow to the outer world.

And Dormé
Had been her friend throughout; his skilful help
Had saved her every trouble; and he came
In weekly visits to her. Yet she kept
Only the face of friendliness for him;
And no more words were spoken.

But the time
Neared for the transfer of his property;
And he had begged that when the moment came
She would, once more, come with him to the Hall,
And lift the portrait from his father's room;
He could not bear to face again the spot
So full of memories; would she spare this pain?
Ay! that she gladly would. So all was planned
To save him anguish.

June was gliding soft
Into July, and but a week remained

Wherein he still would keep apparent hold
Upon the Dorme estates. One sunny morn
The roses opened widely their great blooms,
And Milicent wandered through her garden walks
To pluck the fairest blossoms. Not for long
She held the little house; the way was dark
Before her, not for long in happy peace
She lingered where her life had run its course
Through many years. Each common thing seemed sweet
With all regret; she touched the leaf and bush
With soft caressing finger; with moist lids
She watched the house dog, lazy in the sun,
Lift up his blinking eyes and bushy tail
In faintest signal that he recognised
Her shadow passing 'twixt the beams and him.

Then suddenly she heard a step, and turned;
Someone advanced towards her from the gate;
And all the roses showered their creamy blooms
Upon the ground from out her startled hands;
For it was Viola!

"Oh! Milicent!"

She stood up grave, and cold, and very still.
At any time her ardent artist soul
Had shrunk from Viola's dull pretentiousness
And shallow cleverness. But now she stood
Frozen in strong dislike; and yet her eyes
Could not prevent their meaning look of love,
And this drew Viola, as against herself.

"What is it, Viola?"

"Oh! let me speak
A moment with you! Can you give me help?
I cannot of myself make my appeal
To Clement Dorme, for since that dreadful day
My heart has feared him. Milicent, he came
Upon the morrow (you had disappeared,
Sir Basil and myself were quite alone);
He looked at me, and said,—the Will was gone!
And, being so, that all the property
Was mine in law; and he had no more claim
Than any stranger; but we all had known
His father's wish to leave him as his heir
In undisturbed possession; this being so,
'Twas his in justice.

"And I did not speak;
He looked at me so terribly. But then
My father answered: 'Can we need a proof
That thus he wished it? For myself,' he said,
'My interest is nothing, and my child'——

"Here Clement interrupted with a face
Most dark and stern, saying: 'I claimed her hand
Thinking that I was rich. I give her back
The troth she gave me, thinking I was rich.
But she may marry elsewhere, and her heirs
Will seek more earnestly than you will do
Some proof that I have rightful claim to Dorme—
I have no claim! Dorme Hall is Viola's,
The Will being gone. I only ask for time
To search for it;'—and here he looked again
Upon me, and I trembled. 'For a year

I ask for time to search, and at the end,
Sir Basil, for my father's sake, you'll take
All as my gift to Viola, in exchange
For that same troth I gave her?'

"Then rose up
My father in great wrath; and thus he spoke:
'Our honour is the shield of all our race,
But you have flecked it with unknightly words!
Take back her troth? Ay! That my child shall do!
As for Dorme Hall—we do not ask a stick
Out of the whole estate! Keep what is yours!'

"And then the eyes of Clement Dorme were mild
An instant, while he answered: ''Tis not yours
Either to take or lose; nor is it mine.
I ask it as *your favour* that you wait
One year to let me search; and at the end
That it may seem to come to Viola
Just as my gift; this for my father's sake
To hide and keep his secret;' and he paused.

"My father waited for a word from me,
But nothing could I utter; and I saw
He looked from me to Clement; and the blood
Stole slowly from his cheek, and then he spoke:
'I had not thought to break the troth once given
Though I had *known* you beggared, Clement Dorme.'

"He answered him: 'I thank you; and I know
You speak, Sir Basil, from a noble heart,
And mean the words you say. But, for myself,
My terms are these—none other!'

"Then he turned—
My father—with a cold and stately bow
And answered: 'Granted.' And he took my arm
And led me from the room. Oh! Milicent!
He was a ruffian in Sir Basil's eyes;
For me—I knew him as my righteous judge.
You saw me—you and Clement—leave the room
I never should have entered; and he guessed
(Perhaps he found it out) that Lawrence Dale
Had met me at the window!"

Milicent
Stood cold and still, the roses at her feet,
The sunshine fading out of all the day,
And answered nothing.

"But I did not know
The danger to my uncle's feeble life
Of being left in loneliness; I ran
Back to the charge you'd laid on me, but found
The old man dying; and I thought 'twas I
Perhaps had slain him by my negligence
And girlish folly. Thus it was I shrank
From Clement on the morrow; for he knew
And judged me guilty."

Milicent stepped back
With a great sigh of horror. She confessed!
Yet even in confession she was false.

"But help me now! My wrong was not so great!
I liked to think I influenced Lawrence Dale,

I fancied that he hung upon my words;
And when he wrote, he 'could not leave the town
Without one meeting,' and when he arranged
To wait within the shrubbery night by night
Till I appeared at the long window near,
I thought—at last—'No harm to go and speak
Words of advice and comfort.'

"Milicent!
After my father and myself returned
And were at home, by accident I met
Young Dale when I was shopping in the town;
He raised his hat, his face looked cold and pale,
His eyes were haggard, and he sadly turned,
Saying: 'Miss Blount, I hear that old Dorme died
While you were absent from your watch with him.
I knew not that you had an urgent need
To sit so closely by the sick man's bed;
Death is an ugly word to follow hard
On a young man's amusement; and I rue
The part I took in it. And now, Good-bye.'

"'Twas hard, unjust! Within the one short week
Both lovers left me. Then my father looked
Angry, and pale, and worn, and would not bear
The name of Clement, nor of Old Dorme Hall,
Spoken within his presence.

"Milicent,
If I become the owner of the place
I know—I seem to see it—he will turn
All his affection from me. Deep disgrace

It is to him that any man should buy
His troth from me! The splendour of his wealth
Showered upon me to escape my hand!
Thus is it that my father reads the facts;
He even scarce believes the Will is lost!
I dare not tell him all! I cannot speak
The anguish that I feel, nor say to him
What ample ground had Clement for his scorn.
Oh! Save me, Milicent! Make him take back
The dreadful gift he gave! I yield my claim.
The law can't make me take the land; the truth
Is hidden now as ever from the world.
I seem to see the dreary years lie
Before me, and my girlhood's feverish dream
Answered by fact, myself possessed of all
The splendid wealth I envied, but my soul
Shrivelled by the contempt of the three men
Who loved and flattered me; my father first,
Then Clement, and young Dale. Thus to be rich!
I cannot, and I will not take the gift."

"Ah! wretched soul!" thought Milicent; "your crime
In these short months has turned to bitterness!
And can it be your sin was all your own—
Young Dale being innocent of the stolen Will?"

"Milicent! Speak and help me!"

"Viola,
'Tis only full confession, as I said,
And restitution that will ease your heart."

"More than I've said I cannot say, and now
Is restitution all impossible."

"Ah! then," thought Milicent, "the Will is burnt!"
She sat down on a garden seat, and paused
A moment in reflection; but the girl
Dropped on the grass beside her. "Milicent!
I never loved young Dale. No! all the time
'Twas Clement that I loved, and love him still."

"Alas!" said Milicent, "poor murdered love!"

"Will you not help me?"

"What I can, I will."

"Make him take back his land!"

"That cannot be!"

"But grant me some delay!"

"Poor Viola!
I know I dare not give you any hope;
I know his will is fixed. Oh! strive at least
To make confession in your father's ear;
He may find out a way to set you free
From the great burden laid upon your life.
And if not, Viola, then you must take
The path you hewed yourself. But still confess,
And shake the falseness from you. Rest in hope;
Even the sins and follies we have wrought,

Duly repented of, their punishment
Accepted patiently, may strangely lead
At last to better things. I cannot lift,
Poor soul, the incubus of Old Dorme Hall
From these slight shoulders, nor release the hands
That tied these chains about them."

"Milicent,
Is he so hard?"

"I know his will is fixed;
I dare not give you hope."

Then Viola
Lifted a grey shrunk face upon her friend,
And dragged her trembling knees up from the ground,
And whispered: "Let me die." And then she turned
And took her silent way along the path,
Milicent following with her sweet eyes wet
With streaming tears, until the small gate closed
Upon their sad farewell.

At eventide
Came Clement; and she told the mournful tale,
Setting poor Viola's trouble in a light
The tenderest that skilful words could show.

But men are sternest to the beings they've loved;
And with an ashen face and thrilling voice
He answered: "Never name her name to me!
Delay means nothing. Neither she nor I
Have power to put wrong right; I may forgive,

But still I cannot alter. No! She made
The place irrevocably hers. Poor thing!"—
And this in milder tone—"Heaven grant more peace
To her in holding it than ever came
To me in my possession.

"Milicent!
Through all the sorrow of these eighteen months,
Growing as strength grows in a well-used limb,
Has come more inward satisfaction here
Within my saddened heart, than ever came
Within those brilliant and half happy days
When restlessly I craved to be assured
That I was lord of Dorme."

She smiled on him;
But on her smiling ran a wistful tear,
By him unseen, for wretched Viola.

XI.

An open window, where the sunbeams spread
Their myriad golden wings;
A scent of lilies, like an odour shed
From sacred hidden things;
And songs of birds that sweetly wander through
The windless morning and the sky of blue.

And all the fresh spring sounds, the growing green,
The peace and young delight;
The far rooks calling from their lacy screen,
The fair dove's nearer flight;
The little breath that stirs the tender leaves
And tiny chirp of builders in the eaves.

And in the heart a sudden faint surprise
At some sweet plaining note,
Whose silver strain comes thrilling from the skies
Ethereal, remote.
As though some joy renounced or counted lost
Should stray again in murmurs to the ear,
With dulcet touches should the soul accost,
And fade ere memory knew what thing was near.

If from the fireside and familiar land
That gave their early impress to our mind
We wander as in exile; if a chance
Lay shadowy bars between our home and us
Impassable, and down untrodden ways
Of all the world we follow on and on,—
No spot shall wear the freshness of the time,
No loveliness shall seem again as fair,
As that on which our untried eyes awaked,
As that o'er which our untaught mind hath flung
The glory of its wonder. Everywhere
That place is beautiful which is most like
The old and dear, or realizes most
Some tender fancy weaved amid the woods
And native pastures of our younger years.

The sad day came at last; from out Time's hand,
Expected, waited for, it slipped at length
To see the sundering of Clement's life
From his fair heritage. Two letters came
For Milicent that day. Thus ran the one:

"Come early to perform the last sad rite!
Go, sweetest herald, on the way before!
I follow on your steps and seek for you

Within the organ room, I have a mind
To make my exit midst the joy of sound.
Life is not lost—you said it—though no more
I write myself the Master of Dorme Hall."

She smiled a happy smile, remembering
His tranquil cheerfulness when last he came
To see and speak with her.

And then she read
That other letter; 'twas from Viola:
" Dear Milicent, my wretchedness o'ercame
At length my fear, and at my father's side
Kneeling, I told him all. How grey he looked!
But when I moaned and sank, he lifted me
And held me to his bosom, and he said:
'My child, God's punishment is great, and 'tis
Enough. We two will share the rest of it,
Bearing together.' When I cried to him
To alter what I'd done, he said: 'Not so.
Clement has acted sternly, yet his pride
And resolution mark him as a man
Within our honour. But we cannot go
And ask for mercy, seeing that one way
Alone can mercy come.' In this I knew
My father's judgment just. And, Milicent,
'Twere easy now to bear it, but that I
Shall know how to the end of all his days
My riches are a bitterness; and so
(For now I understand his heart) I see
Them henceforth as the riches which I stole,
And wear them as my punishment and chains.

May God bless Clement! And I know he needs
A better woman than I've been to him.
For me—I'm sheltered by my father's love
Who knows me as I am, and so I taste
A little peace. I'm yours, Viola."

Yes, Life was wonderful! Thus it appeared
That what began in dark and dread could turn
Unto best issues. And she thought upon
Clement, heroic amid ruined hopes;
On Viola, driven by repented sin
Into self-knowledge and humility. And much
She joyed to find that, for each one, the pain
Was tempered by alleviations mild
And peaceful touches. If Dorme Hall was gone,
With that unrestful splendour passed away
A narrowing care, a dark and constant fear.
Life opened out her myriad paths, and called
Her friend to sacred efforts, bid him learn
Her deeper pathos, and through gates of grief
Tempted his soul to wider realms of thought,
In whose pure air dogmatic realism
Falters and fails.

'Twas so, for the last time,
With peaceful thoughts haunting her happy face,
She wandered to Dorme Hall.

The thirsty sun
Had early snatched the dew-drops from the flowers,
And now he thrust his lip to cooler glades,
Or to rill-haunted dells. The fox-glove drooped

From her high niche between the shadowy trees,
But on the hedge the glowing wild-rose blushed
To feel the splendour of his kiss. The herds
Lay peaceful in the pastures; in the trees
The song-birds murmured; and upon the hills
The white flocks clustered nearer to the rocks,
Panting for shelter.

It was close on noon
When Milicent reached the Hall: she took the keys
And passed at once to the deserted room.

How chill! how desolate! how undisturbed!
Present and past in one! She widely flung
The windows and made all the golden light
Flow in upon the scene, and then sank down
Trembling upon the couch. 'Twas still pushed out
As on that night; and there the bureau stood
Unchanged and open, on which Clement hid
His face of anguish. There the portrait hung
With its inscrutable eyes, and o'er the panes
The straying creepers reached their tiny hands
And touched again. Amid the tangled leaves
There came a fragrance as of eglantine,
And she could see a little rustic spray
Peeping between the rarer plants. And then
Her thoughts, led by the scents, went wandering down
The ways of memory till they paused at last
Upon that far-away July, when first
Clement had told his story. All the words
Uttered that evening started to her mind
In sudden clearness; but she lingered most

Upon that random jesting-spoken phrase
That heralded the change upon her life:
"*To save a soul . . . one little lie.*" And then
She smiled to feel a shiver run again
Through all her limbs.

"Poor heart! Poor soul!" she said,
"'Tis over-past the early agony.
To-day's deep peace flows softly to that time
Revealing all the dignity of woe,
As evening sunshine stretching far away
Lends sombre glory to the distances.
And Clement! He is safe from all I feared,
Affirming in his life my cherished hope."

Yet still she shivered; all the dusty gloom
Was more apparent in the spreading light;
And tyrant memory laid its stern hold
Upon her, till she turned at last in dread
With eerie feeling that old Ulric stood,
As once she had beheld him, in the room.
In vain the sunbeams hunted all the shades,
In vain the song-birds in melodious glee
Scattered the air in sound! Clearer than sight,
More real than the real, before her mind
She saw him stand, his mournful haggard eyes
Fixed on the portrait; then they seemed to turn
Upon her, looking—looking, while the bush
Of eglantine sent strong and sweeter scents.

She rose, a strange confusion in her mind,
Murmuring: "Ulric Dorme, I have been true!

Yet in the grave, ah! tell me, have you found
That even your dread can turn to good?"

And then
The fancy passed away; a little cloud—
No more—that floated o'er a summer day
It seemed; and briskly to her work she moved,
Lifting the books and papers, making choice
Of such as Clement claimed.

Assuredly
The powers of memory linked to sights and scents
That still surrounded her, had but recalled
Long-dead events to life. Thus had she seen
Ulric upon a by-gone day; and thus
The scents had breathed their odours through the words
Of Clement's speech. And thus the mystery
That links the days and years, and life to life,
Is spoken in a little phrase that shows
The power association lends to bind
The near and far; to make of smallest things
Mediums of fateful issues—turn the leaf
Stirred by a passing breath, the thistle down
(That airy errant messenger that thrusts
Its tiny touch a moment to our cheek)
To agents which may shake from hidden heights
An avalanche of thought upon the soul.

And have we fathomed anything, who say:
"This slight thing held the long lost threads for me,
And kept a record of forgotten days,
And flung them back upon me?"

She had moved
Again towards the bureau, and her hand
Touched reverently the things which lay a-near,
Until it lighted on a carved rich case
That held some simple blotting leaves; it was
A thing to catch an ardent artist eye,
A wealthy toy of fine worked ivory
And pearl and ebony, the arms of Dorme
Were graven on it all inlaid in gold,
And on the edge there was a fair device
Which her form-loving fingers longed to trace;
And so, in idleness, she lifted it,
And then, in idleness, she turned the leaves,
Thinking on Ulric; and there fluttered down
A half-sheet from it with a few words writ
In Ulric's writing. And she looked on it
With a regretful tenderness and thought:
"Perchance here lie the last words that he traced,
Some useless memorandum which he tore
And would have thrust away." And so her eye
Dwelt on the letters; and they were begun
High on the page, and seemed to follow on
A written something on the foregoing sheet
Now rent away—as this again was torn
Rashly across.

These were the words she read:
"*Behind the portrait I have hid*"—and here
They broke off with an angry blotting scrawl
That ended all in mystery.

She stood

Gazing upon it, reading o'er and o'er
The few strange words, striving to set them straight
In a completer sentence; wondering
Again of what they spoke, to whom addressed—
As, passing down the streets, the fancy takes
Some random phrase dropped by a stranger mouth
To turn it idly in the mind, and seek
Some well-imagined frame to set it in,
Of fitting context.

Suddenly there sprang
A perfect structure of all likelihoods
Before her mind. The hint of it once given
Ran lightning-tipped along the past, and set
Each fact a-fire with truth.

The solemn charge
Of dying Ulric, and his restlessness
And dark suspicion, and the secret word
That passed with him unuttered—judged by her
And Clement to hold reference to things
Hidden from them, and touching that fair soul
His mother. Then poor Viola's remorse,
Young Dale's repentance—either seemed to speak
Rather the tenderness of innocent souls
Learning their folly, than of minds that schemed
And knew dark deeds. Most rash, perchance, had been
Their judgment, for indeed these words might lift
The black suspicion from these lives, and show
That it was Ulric's frenzied sore unfaith
That undid all, and his mistrustful hand,
Hiding anew the Will, unknown to them

From fancied foes, that on disastrous days
Had blindly thrust them.

At the first, the thought
Was more like a strange fancy, a poor dream
Whose most impossible issues marred the flow
Of clear secure events. No tinge of doubt
Infused into their minds about the Will
Had once disturbed them. After a vain search—
An empty needful office undertaken
By Clement without hope—no backward glance
Upon incredible chances had availed
To draw his mind from its determined rest
In acquiescence. That enchanted hands
Shall raise Aladdin's palace in a night;
Or, on the scaffold, that unsought reprieve
Shall strangely meet him; or, that some romance
Of rare deliverance and rescue swift
Shall challenge misery, had never been
A weakness of his mind. Nor had *she* felt
One short expectant gleam.

And so she pushed
The paper from her, striving to regain
Her active cheerfulness. But thought begun
Not so was mastered; link by link a chain
Formed in her mind of clear and telling facts
That could not be foregone, and at the last
These took possession of her. Silently
She saw each possible consequence unfold
And lie distinct. That thus the Will had been
Huddled away in jealous doubt now showed

As plainest likelihood; that it lay hid
Near her, she seemed to know.

She held her hands
Upon her beating heart and stood erect,
And heard her own thoughts audibly the while
Uttered within her brain, yet could she grasp
No one word clearly. Now a feverish red
Dispersed the pallor of her cheek, and now
Gave place to ashen hues; and in her eyes
The darkness seemed to close upon the light,
And then light chased the darkness.

For an hour
She stood, her sense suspended in the stress
Of inward conflict; and the lapse of time
Was like five fleeting moments. She was ware
Dimly of outer sounds. She heard the mowers
Upon the meadows, and the measured swish
Of scythes amid the grasses, and the swift
Beat of the sharpening flint. She heard a-near
The men and maids at work; the garden sounds
Of busy hands that turned the heavy mould,
Or cropped the edges, or amid the trees
Gathered the ready fruits; she heard the cries
Of wild-fowl from the water or the rush
Of some wild creature to the thicket near,
While all the time a little linnet sang
A long low trill of mild contented joy
Upon a branch close by.

"Disastrous days?"

Hark! for a voice was at her mind's fine ear
Whispering:

"Nay! Remember Italy!
All Clement was, and all he grows to be!
The finger of a higher Hand than man's
Is in this working of events, and lets
The father's love unconsciously release,
From the gross chains that held him down, his son
To set him freely in a wider place.
Ev'n Viola has tasted Life's deep cup,
And her faint soul shall know it good at last,
And growing into sweetness; while young Dale,
Repentant, takes a newer earnestness
And breaks the shackling habit from his life,
Winning the name of soldier. Even he—
Sir Basil—loses all his pedantry
In love's sweet urgencies. Here surely works
The highest Hand! And you? *You* will not mar
The peace of all this virtue by a throw
Of discord in the midst?

"Perform your charge—
No more than that—and then return to Dorme,
Nor snatch the cup of heroism he lifts
Anon to tardy lips. Nay! let him drink!
Life is pain's sequel."

On her pallid brow
There broke a chilly damp; her startled eyes
Moved round the room confusedly. Again
The whisper came:

"You suffered, and you gave
Your years; your life lay at the dagger's point,
And all to save him! First and last, your wish,
Your prayer has been to see him justify
Your heart's conception of his nobleness.
You clung to him when he was cruel to you—
Selfish and false—believing against sight.
Then in his suffering you felt him turn
To something better. Now, his pain is past!
He sets a firm foot on the higher ways,
And claims a nobler heritage. And yours
The hand to drag him back? To give him dross
For gold? and idle riches for a life
Lived strenuously out in fairest deeds?
Oh! will you snatch his virtue's rarer crown,
And set him midst the mediocrities
Of men who stumble on through blinded days
Of ease and emptiness, and sleep and sleep
Through the vain years unto sheer death at last?"

She thrust her hands before her, and lift up
Her face with wild disordered glance, and cried:
"Not thus! I cannot slay him! Oh! from me
This all intolerable pain recall!"

And then a silence fell upon her mind;
Her thought hung in a dull suspense, until
A little breeze blew in new fragrances
Of eglantine that softly wafted by
And wandered round the chamber; on its wings
Floated again the words: "One little lie
To save a soul." The echoed tones were sad

And took imploring utterance, and her mind
Awaked to hear a new voice whispering
In lighter measure:

"Nay! we cannot say
'A lie' of that we know not. Cheer, poor soul!
This dead and worthless paper shall not thus
Condemn your heart to useless suffering.
We crush the fly that stings us, and blow out
A small annoyance with a breath of will!
Destroy this paper with the useless things
There destined for destruction; thrust it down
Amid the heap of torn and scattered sheets
For which it was designed. You will not take
This trifle and in mad unwisdom sow
The seeds of discord, restlessness, distress,
In Clement's mind? What though you search and search!
That you find nothing is all possible!
Nay! that the words have any worth at all,
Hold any meaning, still you cannot know.
'Tis an imaginative act of mind
That links them thus upon those living facts
Now read one way secure for eighteen months.
And this may satisfy. One way at least
Your wisdom lies at fault. Make better choice
And take the near and simple. Do the charge
Laid on you quickly; then leave evermore
This dark and fated place, and turn your steps
To newer paths and peaceful."

She rose up,
For on her knees she had sunk slowly down

Crushing her face upon her hands, but now
She rose and pushed the hair back from her brow,
And drew a long deep breath; and then she smoothed
The paper out and looked on it again.

And, unaware, a yearning took her soul,
Tender, pathetic, sweet with wild regret
For her fair womanhood, her fleeting youth,
Her unfulfilled affection. And she seemed
To see herself a stately loving wife
And mild devoted mother; and there rushed
Tears, half of ecstasy and half of woe,
Adown her pallid cheeks; and yet she smoothed
The paper in her hand.

But suddenly,
Thus Nature's gate being opened, through the way
There rushed a tyrannous and compelling tide
Of passion, and her fair untainted soul
Knew the revolt of rash unreasoning wrath
Against her fate, and the untutored waves
Swept o'er the garden of her erst delight
From very far, and spread tumultuous ruin
Amid her ordered thoughts, the while she felt
The world and heaven well lost for one wild kiss
Of Dorme's impassioned lips.

And there were words
Rushing upon her: "Sin? Yes! Taste of sin!
You hold your soul too long on unstained ways,
And fade in colourless whiteness. Know you not
He waits to take you as his wife? Now set

The seal to loving. Thrust these words away
That rob you of him. Life has not, for you,
Been yet so rich that you may squander thus
Your treasure for a fancy. If 'tis sin,
Know sin, and learn the darker shades of life.
Why hold you from your kind? Nay! hand to hand
Clasp now, in brotherhood, Humanity.
Taste Love and Sin in one! The draught is sweet,
Deliriously sweet, the elements
Are mixed in finest fires of human thought,
The thrills of young emotion through the cup
Run in undying ecstasy, and here
Ferments the wine of fresh and primal time
Crushed by the rosy feet of buoyant youth.
Assert the grandeur of your human will.
Live now! and trample with your queenly tread
These curbs, these fancies of a puling mind!
Choose with your human reason. Can the world
Show lordlier spectacle than one who lifts
A hand of scorn against a shadowy heaven,
Recording his 'I will'—straight on the sound
Of empty thunder? Use your life-strong power
And make your grander choice. On Clement turn
The strong attraction of a coloured soul
Warm with the tints of human-hearted sin,
And be not a white dream. Life opens wide
Her portals for you; see! the myriad-hued
And golden shadows parting, show beyond
A heaven of rich reality, in change
For your pale rigour."

"Oh! my God!" she said,

"I sink in the deep waters!"

"Faintest heart,"
Replied the voice, "it is your coward nerve
That shrinks from sacrifice! You dare not leave
The long-proved ways, and for Love's sweetest sake
Assail the dark and hitherto unknown.
You will not risk by any slightest act
The whiteness of your soul, nor for his sake
Break the long habit that enslaveth you,
Learning the tender frailties of earth
That place you equally amid your kind.
Your habit grows to an encrusted harm
And shuts you from your sympathy with man,
Forbids you to draw near in closer sort,
And keeps you still aloof. Ah! Taste at last
The common daily bread of life, nor feed
Too long on angel's food. Have you not learnt
That nice degrees and scrupulosities
Refine away the body of your strength,
And break the rougher vigour of the will?
Act then as judgment and as heart dictate,
As serious prudence and your love's wise skill
May guide you in this stress, and take no thought
Of blinding superstitions, but affirm
Your right, in fullest vigour of your years,
To use your cultured judgment, and to set
Your veto 'gainst the bond of elder saws.

"Nor dare you silence Nature's sweeter voice!
Her fair behest is on you! Nearer
Than voice of mother, or of sister, or

Of any earthly tenderness and claim,
Comes the faint whisper of the living love
That calls your soul to *him.* And stronger than
The cold unauthorised dividing laws
That hold you from him, is the natural bond
That may not be denied. You shall not set
This at defiance, because the niceties
Of a diseased conscience say you nay!
You still shall urge, through every obstacle,
Near and nearer to him, and shall light
For him, at last, the fires of a fair home
After a lonely way. And dearer
Shall you be to him that—unconsciously
Of how it came there—he shall feel the flush
Of warmer colour through your soul; and you
Shall see him as the prize for which you gave
Your maiden fancies of fair honour's law.
You will not let some notion of the right
And true in act (often the weaker turns
Of thoughts astray) efface your claim in him;
You will not vainly sacrifice two lives
Whose feeling flows to tender unity;
No! You will say: 'For his dear sake I took
A firmer courage to my soul; for him
I broke old dull restraints, and would not let
A hand long mouldered bind my living will,
Nor let long silent voices mar the flow
Of living music, nor by rules of right
And fettering duties stay the airy wings
Of Love and Youth; but, from old bondage freed,
I bird-like soar beyond the snaring traps
And sing of liberty from my fair height

Above the enslavèd souls of other men,
Nor let one coward misgiving break the notes
Of my enfranchised spirit!'"

Then no more
Her thought took shape in words; they were but cries
That wailed about the chambers of her mind
Pathetically mournful. And a mist
Fell on her eyes, and sights and sounds alike
Faded, and slowly on the window seat
She sank in merciful unconsciousness,
Her tender soul shrinking in dread distress
From the unwonted strife of alien things
O'er the reserved enclosures of her mind.

When she awaked the room was filled with light
Of crimson lavish splendour from the west,
And one loud bird sang to the dying day
A peaceful requiem.

And she rose up
Opening her slumbering senses on the joy
And loveliness of earth, and with a sigh
She marvelled at her long and strange delay,
And at the tumult which had swept her brain;
And hastening to the portrait, tenderly
She lift it from the nail and shook the dust
Away that covered it, and reverently
Set it where all the shadowy wreathing leaves
Might play around the brows, and in her sweet
And gentle fancy whispered: "Oh, fair soul!
Smile now in your far heaven! Earth's ill to you

This day by willing hands shall be annulled;
Thus shall your patient heart not miss at last
The assuagement of its grief. This day shall see
One wrong of earth put right."

And then she climbed
Up to the woodwork, and with careful hand
Essayed the panels, till she found at last
One looser than the rest; and with her strength
Gathered for one swift blow she drave it back
Into a space behind, and midst the dust
And darkness she could see a mouldering white,
And drew this forth towards her. 'Twas a roll
Sealed in a musty covering; on the back
Were writ these words: "For faithful Milicent."
And when she tore the covering, she revealed
The long lost Will.

She laid it on her knee,
And turned the leaves, and smoothed the crumpled edge,
And cleansed the stains of damp, and tremblingly
She whispered:

"O my God! Could I have missed
The crowning of my life? But now I take
The treasure Thou hast sent him by my hands,
Sure that Thy blessing follows; for Thine eyes
See not as ours do, and through happiness
Thou leadest some Thy way and drawest them
By words of peace towards Thee. And Thy grace
Hath made me messenger, and I may take
The stings of sorrow from the souls of two—

From Clement and from Viola—and thus
We three shall bless Thee; and Thy way of Life,
Thy single only narrow line of right,
Shall be the chosen pathway of our feet
From henceforth,—who have strayed each one away
A little from Thy Hand, and followed out
The mazes of our own uncertain will.

"Thou knowest that I do not look for ease,
Nor any special happiness in life,
Nor wait for any wonders to descend,
But only have I claimed to feel Thy Hand
Guide me to right;—and only just to serve
A little by my acts;—and not to miss
The sweet occasions which Thy mercy drops
For me to gather,—not to miss the times
When Thy deep searching question bids me show
If I am true,—no! not to fail that hour
When I am called to prove myself in deeds,
Nor lose the joy of having served aright
Thee and Thy creature. Take my heart's best gift—
These blinding tears that mean not any woe—
And if within Thy treasury Thou hast
Somewhat to match my wish aright, ah! give
That blessing with the message that I bring!"

Oh veilèd Faith! thou turnest thitherward
Thy face, and we but see the hinder parts
Of one who hasteneth ever to the light,
And hear an echo—"Follow through the dark"—
Of a sweet Voice that still constraineth us
(Oh, exquisite rare Voice!) to follow fast.

Oh, wingless Love ! thou wanderest on the earth
And some mistake thee, for thine eyes are dim
In weeping for thy Star which sank erewhile
Before a night of gloom, wherein men said
There was not any light upon thy brow
Awful, celestial. But some marked thee when
Thou liftedst up thy matchless orbs, and when
The face of joy smote on thy face of grief,
And they beheld the shadowy pinions move
About thee, and they knew thee what thou wert,
For on thy brow the flower of sacrifice
Bloomed crimson-hued, and thus thy fair lips spoke:
"Who claims me shall not have me ! and again
Who loseth me for right's sweet sake shall wear
My fairest crown !" Oh ! Love, 'twas thus she served.

And as she sat there rose upon the air,
From out the distant organ-room, a swell
Of measured music; wistfully it came,
Mystic, pathetic, deep as human hearts,
Conquering, compelling—till the soul might feel
Therein the revelation of itself
In thought that cannot find the form of words,
But issuing in the ecstasy of sound
Masters, in dominant influence, the lie
That over-masks our deeper self, and lets
The ineffable longing and profound desire
Of mortals to the far immortal things
Pass out upon it; while it tells again
The touching on our orbit of some sphere
That rolls celestial music in its course,

And wanders out upon a deathless path,
Calling and calling to us. Then our heart
Bruised as with great desire and the supreme
Wild touches of an alien life, no more
Shall hide the shuddering wonder of ourself
From our own knowledge; and our faltering lips,
Opening with words, that tell the uttermost
Of our blind guesses, speak the name of "Love"
And then of "Sacrifice."

The theme she heard
Was from the symphony the master wrote,
And loved of all his music.

* * * * *

Clement stayed
His hand upon the keys, and waited; then
The lights and peace of deepening afternoon
Drew him towards the window, and he leaned
Out to the charmèd air and heard the birds
Singing with piercing sweetness to the sun,
And felt the mellow touches of the beams
Upon his brow and hair, and saw the glow
Widen and deepen till the earth and sky
Were like a hollow fire, and in the midst
Floated the early crescent of a moon—
The faintest apparition of herself—
Pale, wonderful, remote.

And as he leaned
He knew it was the last time that his eyes
Might rest upon the landscape of his youth;

And he remembered, as he came along,
The happy labourers, pausing in their work,
Had bid him welcome with their looks and words;
And all the villagers had crowded out
To smile upon him, and the news had spread
Till, like the herald of some joy, the smile
Broke ever on before him.

Then his eyes
Were dim with suffering, and his heart was full
Of unfulfillèd purpose that rushed back
On the warm heart that sent it, crying out:
"You shall not have the right for evermore
To bless this people looking for your help.
Away! And hide you from them!"

And he leaned
Further upon the window, and recalled
The wonder of the music to his heart,
And calmed himself by that uplifted strain.

But as he mused he heard his own name spoken
In thrilling pathos near him; and he turned.

He had not heard her come, but she leaned there
Against the lofty organ pipes; the light
Had clothed her in a mist of loveliness,
And through the coloured glass had thrown a ray
Of wonder o'er her head; and in her hand
She held a roll; and in her eyes he saw
Majestic peace; and on her lips a smile

That smote him with its sweetness.

"All is well!"

He came towards her wondering, and she held
The roll out, saying: "Patient waiting thus
Is justified! and thus I bring you back,
As though from God's own Hand, the heritage
You, at His call, resigned."

She saw his face
Change—as the flushings of the Northern lights
Rush in a coloured tumult o'er the sky.
"We have been rash, we two, and leapt at once
To harshest readings of some mysteries——"

He broke upon her words: "She has confessed!"

"Not so. We two have erred. Her all of guilt
Was ignorant negligence in the brief charge
Of watching laid on her, and then again
A girlish vanity which let her take
Young Dale's assurances (but vapourings of
An idle mind) as meant in serious wise.
She hurried down to meet him, and to bid
Adieu and comfort him—no more than that.
All her unfaithfulness was but the lapse
Of foolish vanity. My heart is sore
To think what heavy punishment we dealt
For her slight folly. See! Pathetic words
She sent to me this morning; her self-blame

Outweighs indeed her wrong! And this same Will
He took, your father! And he hid it safe
From hands he judged might steal it, and he meant
To tell me ere he died, for thus my name
Was writ upon the covering."

All her words
Thundered upon his ears; and all the tide
Of great emotion, sternly pressed the way
Of his compelling fate, came rushing back
In a tumultuous hurry of wild joy,
And doubt, and ecstasy, and unbelief,
Wonder, and strangest suffering.

His face
Hung on her words, and then with a low cry
He hid it in his hands; and there were breaths
That broke from him like sobs a runner sends
O'er-tired with straining for the hard-won race.

Then he was still. She waited; and he turned
Again towards the window; and she knew
He hid his deep emotion. But he said,
Coming towards her: "Tell me, Milicent,
How know you this is true?"

And then she spoke,
And told him all she knew, and how the Will
Lay mould'ring in the panel, and the chance
That wonderfully led her to the clue—
The scanty words—that pointed to the truth.

"And I," he said, "am justly lord of Dorme?
And all the secret is for ever closed?
And this strange suffering is a kind of dream
That came and passes? Can my life then turn
To better days? And set me free again
From the great burden?"

"Thus it surely may."

Again he paused, and then he said: "Too great
The tumult of my thought amidst these things
To set them clear and straight before my mind,
Or to control aright my hurrying speech.
But there are words that come and come again,
And tell me, it is *Milicent* once more
Who brings glad tidings, and alights with peace
Upon my troubled days."

"Ah, Clement! I
Have never seemed so glad as now!"

"And she—
Looking upon my altered high estate
With those strange eyes that see no worth in things
The world holds precious—she will still o'erlook
My disadvantage, and will yet become
My dear and honoured wife?"

And then he stepped
A little nearer with his gladdened smile,
And yet the inscrutable peace within her eyes
Withheld his rash approach. She turned and paused,

And looked on him with steadfastness awhile,
Then answered him with gentleness :

"Not so,"—
And scarce a tremor ran along her voice
To make it sweeter—" that can never be."

Strange words ! And yet they held her truer self,—
The gathering conviction of slow months.
She could not marry Dorme ! By those long weeks
Wherein she walked beside him years ago,
When all her soul athirst for sympathy
Had vainly opened like a morning bud
To empty heavens, she would not marry Dorme !
With the right instinct of a chastened mind
She saw the barrier set clearly down
Between her mind and his. Not less her truth,
Her quiet affection and her faithfulness,
Not less her sweet humility, that thus
She could in words affirm that difference
Betwixt them twain, and calmly say him "Nay."

The momentary weakness that had let
The heart of passion in that finished will
Flame from its limit, burning with a claim
On the sweet things of life, was now subdued.
Better resign a glorious hope than see
Fulfilment ripen into rottenness.
Her judgment, learning by experience
In the far past, dreaded the closer bond
Seeing therein a married loneliness.

But he? How could he read that mind of hers?
"*You will not be my wife!* How, Milicent?"

"Perchance," she said, the while her absent eyes
Wandered, and rested on the peaceful eve,
"Perchance—far off—long past—it might have been.
I know not."

Oh, what wild sad music breathes
Within those words of ours—"it might have been"
That die upon "it cannot."

Then she smiled
A little wistful smile: "But this I know—
Now, in the present, that it cannot be."

He marked her pensive look, yet none the less
He read her quiet unbending will; and straight
He marvelled at the chance which set her "Nay"
On his "I will," after long gentle years
Wherein she grew towards him. Had he not
Given all he had and was, to make amends
For his first wrong? And laid about her feet
His great estate, his name, even his love
(The enchaining fancy of his first young love)
For Viola? Yes! All this sacrifice—
This homage of his heart to her true worth
Beyond all other things!

But as he mused
Perplexed, he lashed himself in sudden scorn!
To the fair level of her heart and mind
Not yet had he attained to tread! Behind—

A laggard—ever must he stumble on
While she walked high and easily above?
Bring sacrifice to her? Flames to the sun,
Or flowers to June, or tints to sunset skies
Then let him offer! And he stood downcast—
This new-made lord of Dorme—all baffled by
The absent peace within a woman's eyes
That rested on the clouds, not him.

And then,
With the uncontrollable impulse of a man
Who still must know the heart he cannot take
Will tremble at his touch, he murmured out:
"You loved me, Milicent!" although the words
He uttered seemed a shame unto himself.

But she turned eagerly and suddenly
Her eyes upon him, saying: "*Was* it love?
And *did* I love you, Clement? Love should serve
And did I serve you right? Was it of worth?"

"Oh, Milicent, you strike me to the heart!
Serve me? But *now* you will not bless my life!"

"Have I not brought you, Clement, in the past
A little blessing?"

And he marvelled much
To see the sudden fervour in her face
Of wistful longing, and the humble fall
Of her deep pensive eyes; and yet he read
No yielding to his purpose in her look.

But in his answer came her great reward.

"Have you not blest me! Milicent, that I
Owe to your matchless courage, and your true
Calm ways my present safety, is as nought
Before the gift you gave me in yourself
And your sweet influence, my one true friend!"

She lifted up her face, and smiled, and said:
"Then love—if it were love—is justified."

And then no more; he could not read aright
Her words, he knew not what her quiet look
And sweet rare smile might hide; an ecstasy
Of pain, regret, confusion, in his heart
Stayed all his speech; he scarce dare venture near
To take her hand, and ask: "Is it Farewell?"

"It is Farewell."

And then he met her eyes
In a long silent look, and, reverently
As brother might a sister, folded her
A moment in his arms, and on his brow
Felt the warm sculptured beauty of her lips
An instant, ere she drew herself away
Serene, unyielding.

And he saw her last
Standing before the organ, with her eyes
Raised to the opal skies, and then he turned
And left her—never more to see her face.

And so the riddle passed out of his life
Unread forever, torturingly sweet
As unknown music, fair as hints that come
And haunt the soul with guesses, incomplete,
Unfinished, lovely as youth's broken dream.

And in due time he wedded Viola;
And all of Dorme rejoiced because he came
To live amongst his people, and he was
The best and kindest squire the land had known.
And Viola brought him children; and she learned
To hold him in great reverence, and his heart
Leaned ever with more tenderness to her,
Because he watched her steady humble aim
To cast away her wordy vanity,
And simply teach her spirit all the grace
Of a true gentle wife who seeks to touch
Her husband's highest trust.

Sir Basil rode
About the land, and marvelled—good old man—
That Clement showed a kind unchanging face
Who once had been so stern.

And Milicent?
There are fair souls who have not any need
Of special circumstance wherein to frame
Their beauty meetly, but in all life's ways
Seek out and find a home where God can come
And set them duties; and whose passing leaves
Trace of their presence in the rarer blooms

Of aspiration and of gentleness
That blossom in all hearts unwittingly.

And through his life she was, in thought, to Dorme,
A star towards which he strove, but which moved on
Ever before him dreamlike in the way.

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